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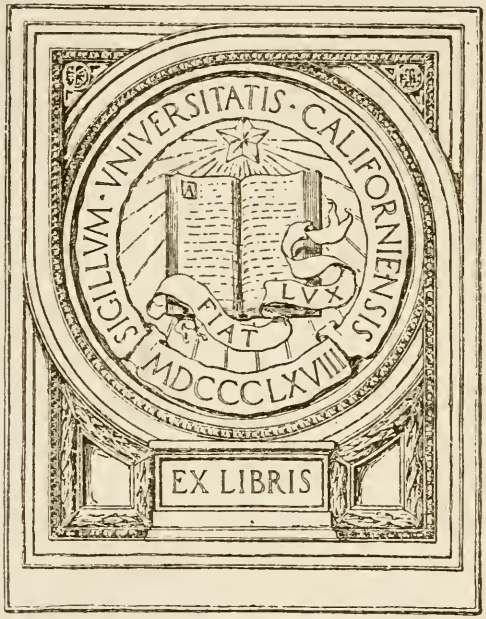
NATURE KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN POETRY

BY ALEXANDER MACKIE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THE LONE HERON.

"Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool."

—TENNYSON.

NATURE KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN POETRY

BEING CHAPTERS
ON
TENNYSON, WORDSWORTH
MATTHEW ARNOLD AND LOWELL
AS
EXPONENTS OF NATURE-STUDY

BY

ALEXANDER MACKIE, M.A.

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LATE EXAMINER IN ENGLISH, ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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"Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her."

—WORDSWORTH.

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PREFACE

While lovers of Poetry are pleased to see Nature-study finding a place in every school, they hail the innovation all the more that it is likely to add fresh interest to the study of Poetry in which accurate Nature-references are part of the charm. The study of flowers, of insects and birds will throw a new zest into the study of poets who are rich in natural history allusions. It is because I think such knowledge is doubly charming and humanising when clothed in poetic language and judiciously used for poetic embellishment, that I have striven to garner the best material of this kind from four poets, who, while they are all devotees of Nature, show considerable difference in their presentation of scientific facts.

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The papers were originally contributed to *The Scottish Field*, to the proprietor of which I beg to express my thanks for granting me leave to reproduce them here.

To Mr. A. W. Robertson, M.A., I am also indebted for kind help in reading the proofs.

Aberdeen, *February*, 1906.

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CHAPTER I

TENNYSON AS BOTANIST

As a subject for poetic treatment nothing comes amiss to the poet, for poetry is here, there, everywhere, if only he has an eye to see and a heart to feel and is in the mood for shaping his thoughts into suitable words and images. There is poetic material in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth; the stars in their courses, the very dust under our feet, the flowers of the field, the wild life of land and sky are all fit subjects for the muse.

> The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.

It all depends on the emotional mood. He may deal with great themes or "build a princely throne on humble truth".

> O Reader! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thoughts can bring,
> O gentle Reader! you would find
> A tale in everything.

Natural history as ordinarily viewed is organised knowledge, truth systematically ordered and detailed with accuracy and precision ; in other words, we call it science. As science, it has its own laws and is expounded in a way of its own. Still its facts and conclusions are not the sole property of the scientist. They are common property as soon as they are made known, and are free to be utilised by every thoughtful human being according to his needs. The poet, therefore, since it is his nature to assimilate whatever comes in his way, is not slow to annex scientific discoveries and turn them to account for his own poetic purposes. Poetry, like every other art, follows at the heels of knowledge, dogging her steps and picking up part of the wealth which she scatters behind her. The modern poet in particular has shown great aptitude in availing himself of all the materials that " the fairy tales of science and the long result of time " have provided in the last half-century. He holds the mirror up to Nature and paints in words what the painter clothes in colours. The outside world—the hills, the trees, the flowers, the insects, the birds, and all wild life have from the beginning been a source of growing interest to souls endowed with poetic leanings, but through the great advances

made in the closer study of external nature it is more especially in recent times that natural science as such has crept into poetry. The poet, learning from the scientist the value of close observation, has trained himself also to be a close observer, and to see things for himself. The naturalist leads the way, but the poet has been an apt pupil, and now keeps his eye as lovingly on the object and scans its minutest features as thoroughly as the naturalist. The day was, in the eighteenth century, when the poet was largely content to sit close in his study and spin cobwebs from his brain with the help of books and without the aid of personal observation in the open air. His references to natural life were conventional and stereotyped and devoid of charm and interest. For a long period not a single new image from Nature was added to English poetry. Nowadays all this is changed for the better, and since Cowper and Burns, down through Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, the accession of new ideas and of minute picturing drawn from actual first-hand contact with Nature is apparent to the most casual reader of poetry.

In Tennyson, above all, is this feature particularly noteworthy. Being the friend of Darwin he

could not fail to be inspired with something of Darwin's loving and minute study of organic life; moreover, he liked to wander by himself along the seashore and on the sandy downs with an eye for everything that could be seen. In no poet can be found more beautiful illustrations of felicitous combination of science and poetry. Here and in subsequent chapters I propose to exhibit something of the indebtedness of poetry to scientific fact; and I make a beginning with Tennyson, in whom it is so exceptionally striking.

It is evident that Tennyson was a skilled botanist, much more so than Wordsworth, who, though he had an absorbing interest in flowers, was content with a sentimental but unscientific admiration, and did not display the same intimate and disciplined knowledge as his successor in the Laureateship. Tennyson's range of reference is wide beyond all others. He introduces plants that never figured in poetry before. Chaucer and Burns made much of the daisy — that sweet "crimson-tipped flower"; Wordsworth, too, devoted a whole poem to the same plant, although the lesser celandine was more his favourite, being in a sense a discovery of his own. Tennyson loves the daisy and the violet, the lily and the rose, but

his garden is more catholic and cosmopolitan, and includes the privet and the sunflower, the convolvulus and the speedwell, the willow and the horse-chestnut.

The fruit of the horse-chestnut has a distinctive colouring somewhat rare in Nature, and it has accordingly been adopted as a picturesque epithet in several directions. Tennyson transforms the conventional "chestnut" hair into something fresher and more definite. In *The Brook* Katie Willows' hair is—

> in gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
> Divides threefold to show the fruit within.

It is only the skilled botanist, accustomed to examine fruits as well as the more attractive flowers, that knows how many carpels are combined in the chestnut capsule. Such matters Tennyson has studied with care, and all his descriptions may be taken as perfectly accurate and satisfying the utmost demands of scientific truth. The image appeals very powerfully to all who have seen the beautiful gloss, like that of polished mahogany, which the chestnut carries when its fruit emerges from its encasing shell—a gloss which is speedily lost after exposure to the air. That this is not a merely isolated fact, a piece of chance knowledge on the

part of the poet, is proved by many other references to the same tree. Leolin Aylmer was sanguine of countenance :—

> a but less vivid hue
> Than of that islet in the chestnut-bloom
> Flamed in his cheek.

Here again we have a minute observation of the chestnut flower, possible only to those who have subjected the throat of its petals to almost microscopic examination, for this bright pink speck is not likely to be seen by the mere passer-by. The inflorescence of the same tree—a much more familiar sight—is well described in *The Miller's Daughter* :—

> Or those three chestnuts near, that hung
> In masses thick with milky cones,

where the word "cone" exactly reproduces the shape of the pointed panicle. The same poem describes the chestnut buds :—

> I came and sat
> Below the chestnuts when their buds
> Were glistening to the breezy blue.

This glistening of the swelling buds in the springtime, just before bursting into leaf—Nature's clever way of protecting the tender contents from frost—has never before appeared in poetry. Even this does not exhaust the chestnut references. In that beautiful

fragment, *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, the tree is depicted at a somewhat later stage of growth :—

> And drooping chestnut-buds began
> To spread into the perfect fan
> Above the teeming ground.

Here the keywords are "drooping" and "fan," which together hit off to perfection the chestnut leaves at the stage prior to full leafage. The lines recall Wordsworth's—

> The budding twigs spread out their fan
> To catch the breezy air.

Still another allusion, an autumn picture :—

> And only through the faded leaf
> The chestnut pattering to the ground.

Now, taking these descriptions together, we have almost a complete account of the chestnut tree—its flowers, its leaves, its buds, its fruit—all beyond the reach of one who is not more or less of a botanical student.

Many other examples of minute attention to details of tree botany might be quoted. In *The Gardener's Daughter*, Alice's hair is—

> More black than ashbuds in the front of March.

Till the poet pointed out the colour of ashbuds in March, this was an observation which few dwellers in the country had been able to make for themselves.

Mrs. Gaskell in *Cranford* introduces a character who, in spite of an outdoor life, had never noticed the fact, and takes shame to himself that it had escaped him. Another feature of the ash—its late leaf-time—is skilfully portrayed. The Princess delays to love—

> As the tender ash delays
> To clothe herself when all the woods are green.

How few ordinary people, of those at least who live in cities, know that the ash tree is one of the last to put forth her green leaves!

Tennyson has also studied the yew tree, and knows all about its diœcious habit, its clouds of pollen, its inconspicuous flowers. In *The Holy Grail* we have—

> Beneath a world-old yew tree, darkening half
> The cloisters on a gustful April morn
> That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke.

The smoke is the pollen from the staminate flowers. The same thought appears in *In Memoriam* :—

> Old warder of these buried bones,
> And answering now my random stroke
> With fruitful cloud and living smoke
> Dark yew, that graspest at the stones
>
> And dippest towards the dreamless head,
> To thee too comes the golden hour
> When flower is feeling after flower ;
> But sorrow—fixt upon the dead,

And darkening the dark graves of men,—
What whisper'd from her lying lips ?
Thy gloom is kindled at the tips
And passes into gloom again.

These stanzas were added to the poem in a later edition as if in answer to objections taken to a previous reference where the poet said :—

O not for thee the glow, the bloom
Who changest not in any gale
Nor branding summer-suns avail
To touch thy thousand years of gloom.

This was interpreted as meaning that the yew had no flower, whereas all that the poet meant was that the flower is not conspicuous or brilliant, that it has no glowing blossoms ; however, the added section put the matter beyond doubt, and shows that Tennyson was thoroughly conversant with the economy of the yew tree, as also with the fact that in the spring its young shoots are of a lighter green and grow darker as the season advances. It is kindled at the tips and passes into gloom again.

In that exquisitely graceful poem, *The Talking Oak*, there is a whole *bolus* of botany. If a tree could talk, we may be sure its language would be something very like what Tennyson has conceived. He shows the true dramatic faculty of personating a tree—a feat possible only to one with botanical

knowledge. The oak swears and swears in character when he is made to say :—

may insects prick
Each leaf into a gall.

and—

tho' I circle in the grain
Five hundred rings of years.

When Olivia strove to span his waist,

Alas! I was too broad of girth—
I could not be embraced.

I wish'd myself the fair young beech
That here beside me stands,
That round me, clasping each in each,
She might have lock'd her hands.

Yet seem'd the pressure thrice as sweet
As woodbine's fragile hold,
Or when I feel about my feet
The berried briony fold.

Hard wood I am, and wrinkled rind,
But yet my sap was stirred:

And even into my inmost ring
A pleasure I discern'd,
Like those blind motions of the Spring
That show the year is turned.

I, rooted here among the groves,
But languidly adjust
My vapid vegetable loves
With anthers and with dust.

Nothing could be finer as a charming picture of a garrulous old tree which has seen many changes in his fifty decades of stationary life ; he is intensely human in that he is proud of his great age, and eager to pour forth his interesting reminiscences, but he never ceases at the same time to be a tree and to talk as a tree should. Every stroke tells. His coarse rind, the rising sap, his colourless loves, his envy of the young beech, his many rings, and even the galls that disfigure his leafage, his affection for his tiny acorns, are all woven into his utterances by one who can transfigure himself for the time being into a living tree.

The poet's close attention to buds, which has already been remarked upon, might be still further illustrated.

> A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime

gives in a single line a perfect picture of the appearance of the lime when the tender and delicate leaves are pushing their way through the ruby scales of the buds. The same skill is shown in the following :—

> Enormous elm-tree-boles did stoop and lean
> Upon the dusky brushwood underneath
> Their broad curved branches, fledged with clearest green,
> New from its silken sheath.

Here the epithet "silken" is exactly the right one for the bracts of the elm.

The appearance of a wood in the transition stage between bud and leaf is described thus :—

> Such a time as goes before the leaf,
> When all the wood stands in a mist of green,
> And nothing perfect.

It is impossible to exhaust such references without being tedious.

> When rosy plumelets tuft the larch

is one more which is worth quoting, because it serves to show that Tennyson does not describe these things for their own sake, but to fix the time at which certain events take place. This is the poet's way of avoiding the prosaic date—the month and the day of the month. So when he says, "willows whiten, aspens quiver," he is working by suggestion, always a telling effect in poetry ; this is his way of hinting that a gentle breeze was blowing, turning up the silvery undersides of the willow leaves. The same idea is seen in

> realms of upland, prodigal in oil
> And hoary to the wind.

The olive leaves are lighter in colour on the under side.

To turn from trees to flowers lands us in a

wealth of description and allusion from which it is difficult to select. To begin with that all too common weed the dandelion, we find in an early poem the remark that a poet's "vagrant melodies" are borne by the winds till they alight,

> Then, like the arrow seeds of the field-flower,
> The fruitful wit
> Cleaving took root and springing forth anew
> Where'er they fell, behold
> Like to the mother-plant in semblance grew
> A flower all gold.

This is effective enough, but Tennyson improved upon it in later work. In *Aylmer's Field* the two children amuse themselves as many other children have done by blowing—

> From the tiny pitted target
> What look'd a flight of fairy arrows aim'd
> All at one mark, all hitting.

The same metaphorical application is found in *Gareth and Lynette*, where the shield of the warrior called Noon-day Sun flames in the sunshine :—

> As if the flower
> That blows a globe of after-arrowlets
> Ten thousandfold had grown.

The passages show the same minute study that we have been insisting on, but even more remarkable is the felicity of the wording. The "pitted target,"

the "fairy arrows," the "globe" of pappus fruit are triumphs of happy choice. Pages could be filled with examples of this class, proving, if proof were required, that Tennyson knows all the plants and knows them thoroughly in every phase of their growth, that he is not content with a vague general notion of their features, but studies them in their minutest details. This is seen in "The foxglove's cluster of dappled bells," where "dappled" is the very word for the spotted throat of the *digitalis* corolla.

So—

> Bring orchis, bring the foxglove spire,
> The little speedwell's darling blue,
> Deep tulips dash'd with fiery dew,
> Laburnums, dropping-wells of fire.

Here every line is a study, the only phrase that gives us pause being dropping-wells, which is apt to be read as if there were no connecting hyphen. When it is viewed as one word, the meaning is clear. As a parallel to this passage, the description of the cottage gardens in *Aylmer's Field* might be quoted, but I content myself with one or two lines.

> A close-set robe of jasmine sown with stars.
>
> A rosy sea of gillyflowers.

Here was one that, summer-blanch'd,
Was parcel-bearded with the traveller's-joy
In Autumn.

The clematis was white in summer, but in the autumn showed the characteristic hairy fruit of that climbing plant.

Here is Tennyson's picture of the sunflower :—

Unloved the sunflower, shining fair,
Ray round with flames her disk of seed
And many a rose-carnation feed
With summer-spice the humming air.

The poet means that in the garden of his early home the flowers will bloom unregarded by the new-comers until associations grow up to endear the place to them : but mark how the desire for freshness of allusion guides him to choose somewhat unusual cases.

Here is another miniature painting. The Prince's mother had

not a thought, a touch
But pure as lines of green that streak the white
Of the first snowdrop's inner leaves.

Clearly our poet is one who gazes closely into the throat of every blossom he sees, be it large or small. But he can take a large view too, as when he describes a cloth of palest gold, shining—

As shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers.

Another dress was

in colour like the satin-shining palm
On sallows in the windy gleams of March.

We saw that he was versed in the buds of trees, but he is equally at home in flower buds. The Prince's feminine attire, having been badly treated, was

more crumpled than a poppy from the sheath,

and—

like a blossom, vermeil-white
That lightly breaks a faded flower sheath
Moved the fair Enid, all in faded silk.

Lynette's little *retroussé* nose was

Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.

Enoch Arden's wife's shop was

order'd all
Almost as neat and close as Nature packs
Her blossom or her seedling.

The æstivation of flower buds and the placentation of carpels are outside the ordinary man's knowledge, and seldom form part of a poet's equipment, but here our poet shows that they are familiar subjects to him.

Even the diseases of plants, the parasites that attack them, are part of his vocabulary. Sir Kay was a man

> wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
> Root-bitten by the white lichen.

And again—

> No heart have you or such
> As fancies like the vermin in a nut
> Have fretted all to dust and bitterness.

He knows too the struggle for existence that rages among plants as among animals; this he would naturally pick up from Darwin, to whom it was of the greatest import.

> And knowing that of fifty seeds
> She often brings but one to bear.

Moreover, he notes how Nature, abhorring a vacuum, will in time occupy every unoccupied corner with growth of some kind.

> Even bones are bleached
> And lichened into colour with the crags.

And Nature

> Fills out the homely quick-set screens
> And makes the purple lilac ripe;
> Steps from her airy hill and greens
> The swamp, where hums the dropping snipe
> With moss and braided marish-pipe.

This is just the poet's way of saying that the spring will revive vegetation again, but mark how fresh is the selection of particulars. The hedges will fill out, the lilac will ripen its fruit, the marsh will grow green, and the *equisetum*, with its "braided" stems, will rise once more. Freshness, novelty, and the avoidance of the usual and the commonplace are here at their highest.

Here is another variant of the same theme :—

> Now fades the last long streak of snow,
> Now burgeons every maze of quick
> About the flowering squares and thick
> By ashen roots the violets blow.

Note too how when he wishes to fix a colour in the eye he chooses distinctive flowers to bring it home. All "Lent-lily in hue"; "in colour like an April daffodilly"; "as clean and white as privet when it flowers"; "a clear germander eye".

How well he catches the sound of leaves or their characteristic appearance in sunlight! "The dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk"; "momently the twinkling laurel scattered silver lights". The Portugal laurel has a hard, glossy, holly-like leaf, and both of these descriptions are happy and correct.

These passages by no means exhaust Tennyson's

profusion of botanic references, but they are enough to indicate what a genuinely sound botanist he is, and how he is able to bend the hard facts of science to the softer uses of poetry. How much charm is thereby added to his poems only those can fully understand who are themselves more or less versed in the study of plant life. He is always accurate, always pat, always fresh and suggestive ; moreover, he has the artist's power of selecting skilfully, and never wearies us with too much. He does not empty his wallet, he merely chooses a few typical striking cases, the rest being thrown aside. The same qualities will be discernible when we deal with him as a zoologist and geologist.

CHAPTER II

TENNYSON AS ENTOMOLOGIST

We have seen how closely Tennyson applies his observation to every phase of plant life—bud, leaf, flower and fruit—and how he knows not merely the commonplaces but recondite facts which only the student of botany is familiar with. As a last example we may cite from *The Ring* :—

> I am not surely one of those
> Caught by the flower that closes on the fly ;

which proves that he is not unacquainted with insectivorous plants like the sun-dew (*Drosera*), the Venus fly-trap (*Dionaea*) and the butterwort (*Pinguicula*), and can turn them to his own purposes. It remains to indicate how he is equally at home among lower animal forms and insects, and especially birds. He would seem to have set himself to amass new material for his art by delving deep down into strata of knowledge hitherto not systematically explored by the poetic

mind, and there is no doubt this endeavour showed his wisdom, since it gave to his work an individuality which it would not otherwise have possessed. Wordsworth had a conception of Nature quite apart and distinct—a much more deep and penetratingly spiritual notion amounting to a religious cult. This gives him his individuality, but it was no part of Wordsworth's plan to be a scientific expert. He would have disdained to pay heed to such advice, had it been tendered to him ; moreover, science had not made the strides in his early days that it made during Tennyson's maturing years. Tennyson, not being endowed with Wordsworth's spiritual insight, had recourse to scientific study, which not only increased his range of selection, but opened his eyes to many phenomena which, but for this systematic discipline, would have remained a closed book to him. Science outspread her myriad horns of plenty at his feet. He began by feeling the charms of " the fairy tales of science " and his eye grew to be well practised in Nature. In *Amphion* he jocularly refers to the modern muses reading botanical treatises. It is beyond doubt that he was not above dipping into such treatises himself, but he made their facts his own. Like Becket, he is " still a lover of the beast and bird ".

Many a schoolboy is a collector of Lepidoptera and has reared caterpillars through cocoon and chrysalis, to moth and butterfly. This metamorphosis is so striking that we do not marvel to find it woven into poetry, but nowhere has such felicitous use been made of it as in Tennyson's pages. His finest picture in this connection is undoubtedly that of the dragon-fly in *The Two Voices.*

> To-day I saw the dragon-fly
> Come from the wells where he did lie.
>
> An inner impulse rent the veil
> Of his old husk : from head to tail
> Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.
>
> He dried his wings ; like gauze they grew ;
> Through crofts and pastures wet with dew
> A living flash of light he flew.

Could anything be finer, more pictorial, or more accurate? Turn to a treatise on zoology and you will find every particular corroborated : "Their flight is exceedingly rapid, making them the swallows of the insect world. The eggs are laid in water. The full-grown larva climbs up the stem of some plant till it is above water, when its skin splits longitudinally along the dorsal surface and the adult dragon-fly gradually works its way out. Its wings are at first flabby and shrivelled. They

soon expand and assume their proper form" (*The Natural History of Animals*, Davis). The poet has caught all the essential features, and who is there but prefers his vivid description to the tamer and more sober language of the scientist?

Other insect references, though on a less elaborate scale than the one just quoted, are common enough. Geraint galloped up

> glancing like a dragon-fly
> In summer suit and silks of holiday.

And in *The Lover's Tale*,

> the dragon-fly
> Shot past me like a flash of purple fire.

Sir Gareth, when he threw aside his dark cloak, appeared in full armour,

> and flashed as those
> Dull coated things that, making slide apart
> Their dusk wing cases, all beneath them burns
> A jewelled harness ere they pass and fly.

In *The Princess* the suggestion is made that women, aping the academic costume of men, should not wear our rusty gowns,

> But move as rich as emperor moths.

The three youths, when they paid their visit to Princess Ida's college and donned their college gowns, were

> As rich as moths from dusk cocoons.

So we have striking use made of bees, spiders, grasshoppers, always correct, the expression satisfying the most fastidious of scientific purists. A miller working in his mill is compared to a bee covered with pollen :—

> Him like the working-bee in blossom-dust
> Blanch'd with his mill they found.

The three youths already referred to escaped from the Prince's castle, letting themselves down from the bastioned walls,

> Like threaded spiders, one by one ;

and Vivien, enveloped in Merlin's long beard, compares herself to

> a gilded summer-fly
> Caught in a great old tyrant spider's web,
> Who meant to eat her up in that wild wood.

The chatter of grasshoppers mingled in a resonant chorus is

> the myriad cricket of the mead
> When its own voice clings to each blade of grass
> And every voice is nothing.

And old Philip Willows, the chatterbox, is likened in his chirping ways to

> the dry
> High-elbowed grigs (grasshoppers) that leap in summer grass.

Here the epithet "high-elbowed" is a most felicitous stroke of pictorial description. Every one who

has walked through long grass in the summer is familiar with the spittle-like masses (cuckoo-spittle) that hang on the grass-heads and contain a green fly. They come into *Aylmer's Field*. Sir Aylmer Aylmer rose at dawn and

> Sweeping the frothfly from the fescue, brush'd
> Through the dim meadow.

It will be observed that in most cases these pictures are introduced by way of simile. In this way Tennyson is able to utilise a much larger range of knowledge. He had largely developed the faculty of tracing resemblances—a very variable gift in human beings—and many of his applications are exceedingly ingenious without being far-fetched or artificial. Those who have the gift sometimes find it crippled by lack of wide knowledge to help it out. This, as we have seen, was not Tennyson's case.

Worms, polypi and mollusca do not sound poetical, and yet even from such apparently forbidding regions Tennyson can draw poetical imagery.

> The souls of evil men are drawn
> Down, as the worm draws in the wither'd leaf
> And makes it earth.

An allusion this which points to Darwin's well-known and fascinating book on earthworms.

In the early poem entitled *The Kraken* (an imaginary sea-monster) occurs the passage :—

> Unnumbered and enormous polypi
> Winnowed with giant arms the slumbering green,

which is of interest chiefly for the well-chosen word "winnowed," a happy stroke that brings before us in a moment the characteristic motions of pelagic Hydrozoa. These have their interest ; but the most beautiful detailed description of lower life-forms is that of the shell in *Maud*.

> See what a lovely shell,
> Small and pure as a pearl,
> Lying close to my foot,
> Frail, but a work divine,
> Made so fairily well
> With delicate spire and whorl,
> How exquisitely minute,
> A miracle of design !
>
> What is it ? A learned man
> Could give it a clumsy name.
> Let him name it who can,
> The beauty would be the same.
>
> The tiny cell is forlorn,
> Void of the little living will
> That made it stir on the shore.
> Did he stand at the diamond door
> Of his house in a rainbow frill ?
> Did he push when he was uncurl'd
> A golden foot or a fairy horn
> Thro' his dim water-world ?

Here is scientific detail without the clumsy names. These creatures are lovelier than their names, and though some ignorant persons think that science is only a mass of cacophonous nomenclature, the beauty of the forms, the adaptation of means to ends, the indestructibility of the most delicate shapes and colours are strong in their appeal to the imaginative mind. The passage quoted is a perfect description of some forms of Gasteropoda (clumsy name enough !). The golden foot and the fairy horn, the diamond door, the rainbow frill may all be found in zoological treatises. The same image is used in *Geraint and Enid* to bring home the colour of a dress.

> How fresh the colours look,
> How fast they hold, like colours of a shell
> That keeps the wear and polish of the wave.

The reptiles and the fishes would not seem to have been the object of Tennyson's study, and yet occasional reference of a significant kind may be found to even these. He knows that serpent eggs are found in clusters, that snakes sometimes cover their prey with slime before they gorge it, that the serpent fascinates creatures by its gaze and thus facilitates their capture, and he makes felicitous application of these facts.

One in whom all evil fancies clung
Like serpent-eggs together.

And snake-like slimed his victim ere he gorged.
As birds the charming-serpent draws.

There are two striking references to fishes, both of them pictures of what is familiar enough to ordinary observers, but they are worth quoting for the fine choice of words. The first is a picture of a diseased gold-fish in a pond.

A pool of golden carp—
And one was patch'd and blurr'd and lustreless
Among his burnish'd brethren of the pool.

The other is that well-known passage, suggested it would almost seem (so closely parallel are the two pictures) by a similar description in Keats, of minnows in a clear stream.

Like a shoal
Of darting fish, that on a summer morn
Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,
But if a man who stands upon the brink
But lift a shining hand against the sun
There is not left the twinkle of a fin
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower.

These examples must suffice for the present. In the next chapter we hope to deal with the much larger and more generally interesting subject of bird life, in which Tennyson proves himself as great an expert as in zoology of a lower grade.

CHAPTER III

TENNYSON AS ORNITHOLOGIST

No class of living creature occupies so much of the poet's attention as the birds. They are of course songsters like himself; "he pipes but as the linnets sing". The nightingale and the lark for long monopolised poetic idolatry—a privilege they enjoyed solely on account of their pre-eminence as song-birds. Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* and Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark* are two of the glories of English literature; but both were written by men who had no claim to special or exact knowledge of ornithology as such. When Wordsworth wrote his *Ode to the Cuckoo* he showed himself more of an observer, although he thought it necessary to ignore some of the more obvious and least pleasing characteristics of this peculiar bird. Even Pope once wrote a fine description, in the Popian kind, of a cock-pheasant. Here again, however, as compared with other poets, Tennyson claims the same

superiority in minuteness and accuracy of detail as he has earned in other fields. It was his good fortune to live through a period when an impetus was given to the study of feathered life, and in this as in other things he was influenced by the spirit of his age. He was not a strikingly original genius fated to make new departures ; he rather owes his success and popularity to his adaptability, to the facility with which he adopted the thoughts and fell in with the habits of his time. Many persons are observers of bird life, when they observe and record nothing else zoological ; having made a beginning in this department they often extend their studies in other directions. Bird life is fascinating ; it is on the whole easy to observe ; the plumage, the nest, the song, the flight, the migratory habit, combining to make this study one of widespread interest.

Tennyson, like the three great poets above mentioned, has devoted individual poems to certain birds—*The Blackbird* and *The Throstle*—but he knows the habits or the notes of the robin, the linnet, the ptarmigan, the partridge, the rook, the kingfisher, the owl, the heron, the kestrel and others ; he has studied the migration of birds and makes many striking references to that side of their life ;

he is quite familiar with the evolutionary exposition of the struggle for existence which, potent everywhere, is equally operative here. Let us illustrate some of these points.

In *The Blackbird* the poet informs us that he encourages such birds to frequent his garden, being in this respect a contrast to his neighbours who shoot these fruit thieves. He does not protect his black-heart cherries with a net, only he expects in exchange for granting this privilege to have song, and humorously hints that the bird's good feeding has atrophied his vocal powers. He does not make the mistake many of his predecessors have made, of supposing that the female bird sings. He has observed, too, that after the spring love-making is over, the blackbird is silent and uses the gold dagger of his bill for more prosaic purposes—namely "to fret (*i.e.*, eat) the summer jenneting" (a species of early apple).

A golden bill! the silver tongue
Cold February loved is dry,
Plenty corrupts the melody
That made thee famous once, when young.

And in the sultry garden-squares
Now thy flute-notes are changed to coarse,
I hear thee not at all, or hoarse
As when a hawker hawks his wares.

It is quite correct that as summer advances, the mellow, flute-like notes of the blackbird become harsh and coarse.

The Throstle (which is only a more poetic name for the thrush) is devoted to reproducing and interpreting the delightful song of this bird, as if answering his own question which he put in *The Gardener's Daughter*: "Have the birds any sense of what they sing?" The poet has listened to the song of the thrush till he has caught its every note, and is able to translate it into English. Nothing could be sweeter, truer or more happy.

> "Summer is coming, summer is coming,
> I know it, I know it, I know it,
> Light again, leaf again, life again, love again,"
> Yes, my wild little poet.

The "new, new, new, new" and "Here again, here, here, here, happy year" are a perfect facsimile of the song, and at once bring before us a picture of a leafless tree in March on which is perched, facing the sinking sun, a speckle-breasted thrush, pouring forth his characteristic warbles. This passage throws light on a line in *Maud*:—

> Maud is here, here, here,
> In among the lilies,

and points to the thrushes singing "in our wood".

Compare with this Browning's fine passage :—

That's the wise thrush : he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture.

It is not surprising that a poet with Tennyson's endowment of word-music should make much of birds' notes, consequently we have many beautiful passages dealing with this theme. In *Lancelot and Elaine* occurs—

Then as a little helpless, innocent bird
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, " Must I die ? "

Here he does not condescend on the particular kind of bird. Was it a young canary, caged in the poet's own home ?

There is another passage, which though long, must be quoted because it hits off the poet's ways so felicitously.

And as the sweet voice of a bird
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
That sings so delicately clear and make
Conjecture of the plumage and the form ;
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint ;
And made him like a man abroad at morn

When first the liquid note beloved of men
Comes flying over many a windy wave
To Britain, and in April suddenly
Breaks from a coppice gemm'd with green and red,
And he suspends his converse with a friend,
Or it may be the labour of his hands,
To think or say, "There is the nightingale,"
So fared it with Geraint.

Every line of this is characteristic, and paints Tennyson himself as surely as it depicts the situation he is trying to realise.

Other birds' notes, some of them not so liquid, are happily caught. The well-known cries of the partridge heard in the evening are

like a rusty key
Turned in a lock.

The partridge-call is difficult to describe and has baffled many an expositor, but here we have it exactly reproduced. The wood-pigeon with his soft coo-coo is one of the commonplaces of the woods, and Tennyson has made several endeavours to recall that soothing, liquid sound, some more successful than others.

The moan of doves in immemorial elms

is particularly fine. Another variant is,

From the woods
Came voices of the well-contented doves.

The rook, being so ubiquitous and so constantly in evidence, is sure to find a place in such a poet's verses. This bird's vocal powers are made use of in *Maud*.

> Birds in the high Hall garden
> When twilight was falling,
> Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,
> They were crying and calling.

There has been controversy on the passage, and some have thrown doubt on the rook as the author of the note, but undoubtedly it is, and can be nothing but the rook. Indeed we have it on the authority of Mr. Andrew Lang (*Tennyson*, p. 93) that the poet himself declared for rooks. The circumstances will fit no other bird, just as farther on, in the same lyric, the "here, here, here," quoted above, must be ascribed to the thrush. The ways of rooks are the subject of Tennyson's study, and many are the references in his poetry to their habits, which he describes with the truth that comes from first-hand knowledge and direct personal observation.

> Like a clamour of the rooks
> At distance, ere they settle for the night.

Again,

> As the many-wintered crow that leads
> The clanging rookery home.

Once more, in *The Princess* :—

> A shout arose again and made
> The long line of the approaching rookery swerve
> From the elms.

Still further, in *Aylmer's Field*,

> and oft, as dawn
> Aroused the black republic on his elms.

And that fine picture of a rising gale which is so vividly helped out by the line :—

> The rooks are blown about the skies.

We will conclude this side of the subject by quoting a miscellaneous group of short passages, which though individually not so striking, yet when taken in the mass, attest very impressively the poet's systematic attention to all bird ways.

> As careful robins eye the delver's toil.

Who that has done a little amateur gardening, but must acknowledge the force of this humble simile?

> The starling claps his tiny castanets.
>
> About as long
> As the wind-hover (the kestrel) hangs in balance.
>
> Like doves that sun their milky bosoms
> On the thatch.
>
> Like birds of passage piping up and down
> That gape for flies.

Shook, as the thistle shakes,
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed.

The filmy shapes
That haunt the dusk, with ermine capes
And woolly breasts and beaded eyes (owls).

Underneath the barren bush
Flits by the sea-blue bird of March (king-fisher).

An echo like a ghostly wood-pecker.

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool.

The cuckoo told his name to all the hills.

Such a (hissing) sound as makes
The white swan-mother, sitting, when she hears
A strange knee rustle through her secret reeds.

The women sang
Between the rougher voices of the men,
Like linnets in the pauses of the wind.

As a parrot turns
Up thro' gilt wires, a crafty loving eye
And takes a lady's finger with all care,
And bites it for true heart and not for harm,
So he with Lilia's.

We came upon
A wild-fowl sitting on her nest, so still,
I reach'd my hand and touch'd; she did not stir;
The snow had frozen round her, and she sat
Stone-dead upon a heap of ice-cold eggs.

No reader of these passages but will be ready to adopt Rosamund's language when she said to Becket :—

> "They say that you are wise in winged things
> And know the ways of Nature."

We must not forget to give that passage in *Locksley Hall*, which though almost hackneyed as a quotation, is very pat here, as being a scientific fact finely worded.

> In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast,
> In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest,
> In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove.

The same thought—that the mating season is the time of maximum brightness in birds' plumage —is found in the *Progress of Spring*.

> The linnet's bosom blushes at her gaze.

The phenomena of migration—a subject of absorbing interest and no small mystery in connection with birds—have engaged Tennyson's attention, and he makes exquisite use of them. How well he describes an irrepressible instinct by means of this illustration :—

> Bar the bird
> From following the fled summer—a chink—he's out,
> Gone !

Again,

> Spring is the time when fly
> The happy birds that change their sky
> To build and brood ; they live their lives
> From land to land.

Still better is the simile in the *Passing of Arthur* :—

> Like wild birds that change
> Their season in the night and wail their way
> From cloud to cloud.

And again that impressive opening to *Demeter and Persephone* :—

> Faint as a climate-changing bird that flies
> All night across the darkness, and at dawn
> Falls on the threshold of her native land
> And can no more.

Enoch Arden is lured to the ruddy light of his wife's home,

> As the beacon-blaze allures
> The bird of passage, till he madly strikes
> Against it, and beats out his weary life.

During the commotion in her college, the Princess stood

> Fixt like a beacon-tower above the waves
> Of tempest, when the crimson-rolling eye
> Glares ruin and the wild birds on the light
> Dash themselves dead.

How true all such pictures are is known best to a student of bird-life like Mr. Eagle Clarke,

who has spent weeks in the Eddystone Lighthouse, or in light-ships, collecting facts about bird migration. Tennyson, having resided much in the Isle of Wight, would seem to be in touch with these researches. Witness his comparison of the cheerful, sanguine mind which no gloom can sadden, to

> the tall ship, that many a dreary year
> Knit to some dismal sandbank far at sea,
> All thro' the livelong hours of utter dark,
> Showers slanting light upon the dolorous wave.

This would suit in every particular (except perhaps "tall") the Kentish Knock—one of the best-known light-ships on the English coast, and an important observatory for students of migration.

The cruelty of Nature which is so marked a feature during migration, slaying birds by the thousand, is also referred to by Tennyson in other connections. There is nothing of this in Wordsworth ; the later poet learned it from his scientific studies in evolution.

> For Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal,
> The May-fly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the shrike,
> And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder and prey.

And the same thought is more briefly and violently expressed in *In Memoriam*, in the familiar

phrase, "Nature, red in tooth and claw with ravine". He puts it in another way :—

> The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour,
> Woos his own end.

The poet has got firm hold of the principle of protective coloration, and everything is grist that comes to his mill; he can turn all his knowledge to striking account.

There are still other aspects of science that Tennyson affects. In the next chapter we propose to deal with the higher animals, with Astronomy and Geology, all of which are fruitful in matter suitable for our inquiry.

CHAPTER IV

TENNYSON AS GEOLOGIST

TENNYSON was neither a traveller nor a sportsman, and, in consequence, he makes little mention of any of the mammalia that are not familiar to the habitual resident in England. He must have been a great reader, but he wisely refrained from allusions to animal life with which he himself had not come into direct contact. And although not a sportsman with gun or rod, yet living in constant intercourse with sporting Englishmen, he could not fail to be imbued with something of the sportsman's instincts and interests, and this is notably evident in his references to horses and dogs, especially the latter. Walter Scott was a born sportsman, and his poetry and his Waverley novels attest at every point this side of his nature—his love of dogs and horses, deer chases and otter hunts. Shakespeare, too, having been brought up in the country, knew the points of a good horse, was thoroughly familiar with the tricks of a hare,

and perhaps also was a deer poacher. But Tennyson, although he loves dogs of the more domestic type, gives no evidence that he ever followed a fox or a stag, or even spent a day in rabbit shooting. Indeed, that reference to the rabbit in *Aylmer's Field*,

> The rabbit fondles his own harmless face,

is not the description that would come to the pen of a rabbit-shooter. But he is at home in the woodlands and is keenly alive to the ways of the creatures that house there. Psyche, in *The Princess*,

> Veiled her brows, and prone she sank, and so
> Like tender things that, being caught, feign death,
> Spoke not nor stirr'd.

This makes no specific mention of any animal, but the description will apply to the hedgehog and many others.

> The hedgehog underneath the plantain bores,

shows personal observation at work, and, as usual, it is correct, the hedgehog loving a leafy covert in which to screen himself during the day.

> Laid up like winter bats,

shows that he is familiar with the hibernating habit of these interesting creatures. He has made the acquaintance of the badger :—

> Live like an old badger in his earth,
> With earth about him everywhere.

But to horses. Readers of *The Brook* will recall that charming episode of the colt which Philip Willows sold to the squire, a colt whose elaborate pedigree is so amusingly detailed. The whole passage is strikingly English, and could have been written only by a man who loves a good horse, and is fully in touch with the principle of heredity. So, as a specimen of the poet's familiarity with equine ways we may quote :—

> He laugh'd, and I, though sleepy, like a horse
> That hears his corn bin open, prick'd my ears.

This and other references speak for themselves.

> For still we moved
> Together, twinn'd as horse's ear and eye.

> Feeding like horses when you hear them feed.

Tennyson has studied the ways of dogs—their love of fighting, their attachment to man, their addiction to dreaming, their detestation of rats. He has even seen a litter of puppies and noted their characteristic trembling.

> Then from the plaintive mother's teat he took
> Her blind and shuddering puppies, naming each.

> As the dog
> With inward yelp and restless forefoot plies
> His function of the woodland.

> Like a dog, he hunts in dreams.

Scott, in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, had already used this observation :—

> The staghounds, weary with the chase,
> Lay stretched upon the rushy floor,
> And urged, in dreams, the forest race
> From Teviotstone to Eskdale Moor.

Take next a graphic description of an interrupted dog-fight :—

> As the cur,
> Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
> Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,
> His owner, but remembers all and growls
> Remembering.

In *Geraint and Enid* two spearmen advance,

> Each growling like a dog, when his good bone
> Seems to be pluck'd at by the village boys,
> Who love to vex him eating, and he fears
> To lose his bone, and lays his foot upon it,
> Gnawing and growling.

This is a finely-worded description of a common-place incident ; still better is that vivid picture where Gawain, seeing a villainy done, forbore,

> But in his heat and eagerness
> Trembled and quivered, as the dog, withheld
> A moment from the vermin that he sees
> Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.

The foregoing passage makes it clear that Tennyson was present at a rat-worrying competition, perhaps in his undergraduate days at Cambridge.

While all these excerpts are interesting enough, they hardly belong to natural science proper, except in so far as every careful and accurate observation, if correctly put into words, is the foundation of scientific truth. We must now turn to Geology —a science which Tennyson has studied with profit to his poetry. He has dabbled in all the sciences, and has drawn inspiration and suggestions from Astronomy, Electricity, Spectrum Analysis, as well as from the Nebular Hypothesis.

We begin with that humorous description of a pigeon pie in *Audley Court* :—

> A pasty costly made,
> Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay
> Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks
> Imbedded and injellied.

A very happy use of simile, ludicrously degrading to the great science of Geology, and apt to be thrown away upon those who have never seen a rock thick with embedded Trilobites. In Sir Walter Vivian's abbey there lay

> Huge Ammonites and the first bones of Time.

Fossils again ; and how skilfully Tennyson gets over the difficulty of the " unlovely names," Megalosaurians, Plesiosaurians, and so on. He shows the same ingenuity in *The Princess* :—

That afternoon the Princess rode to take
The dip of certain strata to the North.

And in the outcrop by the river-bed, there

Stuck out
The bones of some vast bulk that liv'd and roar'd
Before man was.

A little farther on we are treated to a charming description of a geological excursion, which is so well done that we must conclude that Tennyson himself was once a member of a field club or attended a class in field-geology.

We wound
About the cliffs, the copses, out and in,
Hammering and clinking, chattering stony names
Of shale and hornblende, rag and trap and tuff,
Amygdaloid and trachyte.

Here he masters with rare skill the difficulty of the hard names, and that without sacrificing a jot of the truth.

Or like an old-world mammoth bulk'd in ice,
Not to be molten out.

Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime.

These extracts show that the poet has tried to realise the prehistoric times when monsters trod the earth and battened upon each other. He realises, too, the cruelty of Nature and the vanish-

ing in the struggle for existence of many types of animal life.

> "So careful of the type?" but no.
> From scarped cliff and quarried stone
> She cries, "A thousand types are gone:
> I care for nothing, all shall go".
> —(*In Memoriam*, lvi.).

Our closing passage in this connection must be those two well-known stanzas from *In Memoriam* (cxxiii.) describing the changes that the earth's surface has undergone—the constant disintegration of the solid land and the equally constant building up that follows. The extract shows a fine geological instinct and knowledge, and, as always, a unique power of expression, which never fails him.

> There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
> O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
> There, where the long street roars, hath been
> The stillness of the central sea.
>
> The hills are shadows, and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist, the solid lands
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

This reads almost like a gloss upon a passage in Sir Archibald Geikie's recent work, *Landscape in History*—a passage in which he tells how he "found

the splintered slabs of stone (on the wind-swept summit of Slieve League in Donegal) to be full of stems of fossil trees. Here, two thousand feet above the sea, lay a cake of the carboniferous rocks called millstone grit. This little remnant on the highest ground of the district demonstrated that a sheet of millstone grit once stretched over that remote part of the island, and may have extended much farther westward over tracts where the Atlantic now rolls."

The Nebular Hypothesis is a conception of such grandeur that it naturally appeals to a poet, and Tennyson has mastered it in all its significance as an indirect proof of Evolution.

> They say
> The solid earth whereon we tread
>
> In tracts of fluent heat began,
> And grew to seeming random forms,
> The seeming prey of cyclic storms,
> Till at the last arose the man.

The same subject is picturesquely dealt with in *The Princess*, where Psyche's lecture, giving an account of the origin of the world and an explanation of woman's abject place in it, is reproduced thus :—

> This world was once a fluid haze of light,
> Till toward the centre set the starry tides,
> And eddied into suns, that wheeling, cast

> The planets ; then the monster, then the man,
> Tattoo'd or woaded, winter-clad in skins
> Raw from the prime, and crushing down his mate ;
> As yet we find in barbarous isles, and here
> Among the lowest.

Spectrum Analysis is thus alluded to in *In Memoriam*, xxi. :—

> When Science reaches forth her arms
> To feel from world to world and charms
> Her secret from the latest moon.

This brings us to Astronomy. Here again the poet shows his wonted familiarity with recondite topics. He is not only fully impressed by the grandeurs of the starry heavens ; he has made a study of the science, and thoroughly realises many aspects of astronomical lore which are but feebly apprehended by those who are not practical astronomers. He can talk

> Of sine and arc, spheroid and azimuth
> And right ascension.

He is conversant with the relative position of the various constellations at different seasons, he has assimilated recent speculations as to the condition of the moon and surmises about the planets as homes for living creatures. He seems to have attained to a clear vision of the whole working of the solar system and its gradual decline.

Note how at the end of *Maud* he fixes the time of year by an astronomical description :—

It fell at a time of year
When the face of night is fair on the dewy downs,
And the shining daffodil dies, and the Charioteer
And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns
Over Orion's grave low down in the West.

Orion's belt appears also in *The Princess*.

Like those three stars of the airy Giant's zone
That glitter burnish'd by the frosty dark,
And as the fiery Sirius alters hue
And bickers into red and emerald, shone
Their morions, wash'd with morning, as they came.

It is almost superfluous to quote the well-known couplets from *Locksley Hall* :—

Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went to rest,
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the West.

Many a night I saw the Pleiads, rising through the mellow shade,
Glitter like a swarm of fire flies, tangled in a silver braid.

Less familiar is the comparison of a burning tower to the *Aurora Borealis* as it pulses among the Northern constellations :—

The live North
Red-pulsing up thro' Alioth and Alcor.

Many know the Pleiads, Orion, Auriga and Sirius who are not familiar with the stars here named : Tennyson is at home among them all.

> Arthur's harp (Lyra), tho' summer-wan,
> In counter motion to the clouds allured
> The glance of Gareth.

He has seen Saturn's ring through a telescope ; and just as Milton, having seen the moon through the telescope of Galileo, utilised his experience for poetic purposes, so Tennyson finds an observation of that kind too good to be thrown away. Consequently we have in *The Palace of Art* the following :—

> Still as, while Saturn whirls, his steadfast shade
> Sleeps on his luminous ring.

A few other passages may be cited :—

> At noon or when the lesser wain
> Is twisting round the Polar Star.

This is the poetic rendering of midnight. Again, the Princess was

> liker to the inhabitants
> Of some clear planet close upon the sun.

> Till this outworn Earth be dead as yon dead world the moon.

We have by no means exhausted Tennyson's science, yet we have covered most of the ground, except that we have not dealt separately with his

expression of the Evolution Hypothesis. This conception he clearly adopted, and it pervades his poetry so far as it was written after the publication of the *Origin of Species* (1859). We must content ourselves with two couplets from *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*:—

Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud.

Many an æon moulded earth before her highest, man, was born,
Many an æon too may pass when earth is manless and forlorn.

To turn back for a moment over the wide intellectual area that has been traversed—Botany, Zoology, Geology, Astronomy—it must be apparent how largely Tennyson was indebted to scientific truth for suggesting new ideas in his poetry, and how much charm and freshness these added to his verse. If all such pleasing references as we have quoted—allusions to scientific fact so skilfully and correctly utilised—were to be excised from his pages, although much would still be left of the highest value, we should miss the individuality which science gave to his work. How far he surpassed all other poets in this regard will be seen when we come to search for similar applications of scientific truth to poetic purposes in other poets.

It has been often affirmed that science and poetry are opposed and that science will ultimately kill poetry. Keats thought that Optics, by explaining the rainbow, had robbed it of its poetic halo of mystery and enrolled it among common things. It is all false, and we have only to point to Tennyson in proof of its falseness. Science is the auxiliary, not the enemy, of poetic art, and creates as many new mysteries as she explains.

CHAPTER V

WORDSWORTH AS A NATURE POET

It is a far cry from Tennyson to Wordsworth as exponents of scientific fact and minute observation. We have seen how lovingly Tennyson dwelt on microscopic details in flowers, and how closely he studied the habits and the notes of birds. Wordsworth loved Nature with an ecstatic fervour—an overmastering passion that Tennyson could not boast ; his eye and his ear were open to be played upon by every natural appearance in hill, in cloud, in stream and in tree ; but his outlook was broader and, in one sense, less intimate. In other words, he was less of a scientist in the modern acceptation of that term than Tennyson. He was always accurate so far as his observation went, but he rather despised too inquisitive examination.

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings ;
> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things ;—
> We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art ;
Close up those barren leaves ;
Come forth and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

In *Expostulation and Reply*, while expressing the same thought, he insists that we can feed our minds "in a wise passiveness," that it is a mistake to be always seeking, that if we open our hearts in reverence, Nature will enter. Hence he has a certain aversion to the modern botanist who explores every corner of a hillside or a shady wood in his search for rare plants, and, when he has found them, pulls their blossoms to pieces to discern their floral structure.

One, all eyes
Philosopher ! a fingering slave,
One that would peep and botanise
Upon his mother's grave.

Yet in his preface to "This lawn a carpet all alive," Wordsworth takes a line more sympathetic towards science : "Some are of opinion that the habit of analysing, decomposing, and anatomising is inevitably unfavourable to the perception of beauty. People are led into this mistake by overlooking the fact that such processes are to a certain extent within the reach of a limited intellect : the beauty in form of a plant or an animal is not made less, but more, apparent as a whole by more accurate

insight into its constituent properties and powers." This was his theoretical opinion, but we cannot conceal from ourselves that his dominant temper of mind was rather unscientific. Coleridge showed him through a magnifying glass "the mysteries that cups of flowers enfold"; but as a rule such *minutiæ* did not appeal to him.

We cannot help thinking that Wordsworth held a mistaken attitude towards science. With Tennyson's example before us, we are forced to the conclusion that Wordsworth was grievously wrong when he affirmed that Nature revealed her secrets unsought. The fact is that many of her most charming riddles are solved only after much seeking and close persistent labour. A merely meditative gaze, however sympathetic and however reverent, will not, from a distance, discover all that is to be seen. Yet Wordsworth affirmed, and he was undoubtedly sincere in his belief, that

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good
> Than all the sages can.

He also said in *The Excursion*:—

> How bountiful is Nature, he shall find
> Who seeks not; and to him who hath not asked,
> Large measure shall be dealt.

It follows that we cannot expect to find in him the same kind of illustrative passages, showing the transfiguring of unfamiliar scientific facts into poetry. The truth is that Wordsworth came, for that purpose, a generation or so too soon ; he was an old man before the scientific revival began to gain strength, and by that time his poetic fervour had burned itself out. Yet, although he is less scientific than Tennyson, no account of Nature in poetry, however superficial, can omit Wordsworth, because in his point of view he was unique ; his originality and individuality changed the whole current of English verse. What gave distinction to Wordsworth was the new way in which he viewed Nature at her work and the new way in which she moved his inner being. Nature to him was an all-pervading spirit, and in her presence he felt himself overawed, as an ordinary man may be when he enters a great cathedral, in which the artistic grandeur of the building is supported and harmonised with the splendour of the ritual, and he is prompted to uncover his head and bow his knees in an attitude of humble reverence and sincere devotion. That was how Wordsworth felt as he wandered on the lone hillside and looked up at the gleaming silent stars, or at the gorgeous glories of

the clouds that enwrap the sinking sun. At such moments he caught glimpses of "the light that never was on sea or land," and felt himself to be a great high priest of Nature—a human spirit dedicated to raise his voice in adoration of this august and beneficent power that rules the world. Hence in *Nutting* he asks his sister to

> move along these shades
> In gentleness of heart ; with gentle hand
> Touch,—for there is a spirit in the woods.

And in *Tintern Abbey* he tells us :—

> I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Peter Bell was untouched by Nature's terrors or her charms. To this soulless man the outside world had no appeal.

> A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.

How different was Lucy!

> She shall lean her ear
> In many a secret place
> Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face.

Wordsworth could go farther, and was able with all sincerity to say :—

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Such, briefly, was Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature, displaying the spirit, not of the mere lover, but of the religious devotee, and it remains unmatched elsewhere in literature. However interesting this Wordsworthian Nature-worship may be, it does not concern us directly at present, our purpose being to illustrate only that closeness of observation which may deserve to be called scientific.

Wordsworth loved all flowers, but it was not with a botanist's knowledge that he cast his eye upon them. Thus he is often very general in his flower-pictures. Take this :—

> Through primrose tufts in that green bower
> The periwinkle trailed its wreaths ;
> And 'tis my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes.

Tennyson would not have been satisfied with this description of *vinca minor;* he would certainly have brought in the blue star-like flower ; he might even have called attention to the axillary position of the single blossoms, one at each node, but such minuteness is too punctilious for Wordsworth. Again,

> Bees that soar for bloom
> High as the highest peaks of Furness fells
> Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells.

The bare allusion suffices him ; Tennyson sees the purple colour and the dappled throat of the corolla. So, when Wordsworth is describing a beggar boy with hat in hand, he tells us that the hat was

> Wreathed round with yellow flowers, the gayest of the land.

Tennyson here would have given us the distinct species, but this is not Wordsworth's way. Much more so was this his method in connection with birds, where he is often quite unconcerned to particularise the species.

> The birds around me hopped and played.
>
> He heard the birds their morning carols sing.
>
> The birds are singing in the distant woods.

Fortunately for us, he did occasionally dwell with loving idolatry on single flowers and on individual

birds—the daisy, the small celandine, and the primrose; the skylark, the cuckoo, the thrush and the redbreast.

The common ditch-weed—*Ranunculus ficaria*—the lesser celandine he has made specially his own, having devoted no fewer than three poems to this inconspicuous and unconsidered plant. With heartfelt and sympathetic interest he has watched this wayside waif with the glossy leaves and the golden flower till he knows all its ways. It is one of the firstlings of spring, and this fact at once secures for it a place in Wordsworth's affections.

Ere a leaf is on a bush,
In the time before the thrush
Has a thought about her nest,
Thou wilt come with half a call,
Spreading out thy glossy breast
Like a careless prodigal,
Telling tales about the sun
When we've little warmth or none.

Soon as gentle breezes bring
News of winter's vanishing,
And the children build their bowers,
Sticking 'kerchief plots of mould
All about with full-blown flowers,
With the proudest thou art there,
Mantling in the tiny square.

The plant shuts up its flowers or opens them out according to the state of the light and the temperature of the air.

> Blithe of heart, from week to week
> Thou dost play at hide and seek;
> While the patient primrose sits
> Like a beggar in the cold,
> Thou a flower of wiser wits,
> Slipp'st into thy sheltering hold;
> Liveliest of the vernal train
> When ye all are out again.

And with what intense yet simple pathos does the poet paint one of its overblown flowers, which has lost the power of withdrawing itself under cover and sheltering itself from attack when hailstones have been falling swarm on swarm!

> But lately, one rough day, this flower I passed
> And recognised it, though an altered form,
> Now standing forth an offering to the blast,
> And buffeted at will by rain and storm.
>
> I stopped, and said with only muttered voice,
> "It doth not love the shower nor seek the cold;
> This neither is its courage nor its choice
> But its necessity in being old".

This flower was new to poetry, and Wordsworth's account of its arch and wily ways made it known to many who had formerly ignored its existence. The same cannot be said of the daisy—

That unassuming commonplace
Of Nature, with the homely face—

which has had due honour paid to it from Chaucer downwards, in Wither and in Burns; only it would not be like Wordsworth to dwell entirely on its more obvious qualities. Although he has devoted four considerable poems to its praise, he finds new things to bring to notice, one being that the daisy is a flower that we may find in bloom all through the year.

Thee winter in the garland wears
That thinly decks his few grey hairs;
Spring parts the clouds with softest airs
That she may sun thee:
Whole summer fields are thine by right;
And autumn, melancholy wight!
Doth in thy crimson head delight
When rains are on thee.

In shoals and bands, a morrice train,
Thou greet'st the traveller in the lane,
Pleased at his meeting thee again;
Yet nothing daunted
Nor grieved if thou be set at nought;
And oft alone in nooks remote
We meet thee, like a pleasant thought,
When such are wanted.

This is like the flower itself—very homely and simple, and, above all, true in every particular.

CHAPTER VI

WORDSWORTH'S BIRDS

WORDSWORTH, although he is, as we have seen, in a very special sense, the poet of Nature, is not conspicuous for his knowledge of natural history as such. And yet, the curious thing is that in his early days, before he "found himself," he showed skill in mere descriptions without any high moral purpose; witness his *Evening Walk*, the writing of which was due to his consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as he was acquainted with them, and led to his making a resolution to supply in some degree this deficiency. His pictures of the cock and of the swan are minute to a fault:—

> Sweetly ferocious, round his native walks,
> Pride of his sister-wives, the monarch stalks;
> Spur-clad his nervous feet and firm his tread;
> A crest of purple tops the warrior's head.
> Bright sparks his black and rolling eyeball hurls

Afar, his tail he closes and unfurls ;
On tiptoe reared, he strains his clarion throat,
Threatened by faintly-answering farms remote.
Again with his shrill voice the mountain rings,
While, flapped with conscious pride, resound his wings.

Except it be Chaucer's superb picture of Chanticleer in the *Nonnes Priestes Tale*, there is nowhere in any literature a portrait so minutely painted, so entirely drawn from the life as this of the barn-door cock, but it has no moral lesson ; it is drawn merely for its own sake, for the pleasure of limning it with accuracy and force. A similar remark applies to Wordsworth's equally fine attempt in the same poem to depict a swan. This, though a long passage, must be quoted, because it shows how close an observer Wordsworth was, even at an early age, for he was not yet out of his teens.

'Tis pleasant near the tranquil lake to stray,
Where, winding on along some secret bay,
The swan uplifts his chest, and backward flings
His neck, a varying arch, between his towering wings ;
The eye that marks the gliding creature sees
How graceful pride can be, and how majestic ease.
While tender cares and mild domestic loves
With furtive watch pursue her as she moves,
The female with a meeker charm succeeds,
And her brown little ones around her leads,
Nibbling the water-lilies as they pass,
Or playing wanton with the floating grass.

Here and elsewhere (as in *The Primrose of the Rock*) the poet is not taken up with description, in an endeavour to rival a painter in painting the flower, its colour and behaviour, but rather in drawing moral and spiritual lessons from his meditations on its qualities. So with the well-known poem *The Daffodils*. It is the vision of ten thousand seen at a glance, fluttering and dancing in the breeze, tossing their heads in sprightly dance: it is the picture of this jocund company—this, and no minute botanical investigation of its inflorescence —that gives him such a glut of pleasure. The very sight was a pleasure which he could and did renew at will.

> For oft, when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude;
> And then my heart with pleasure fills,
> And dances with the daffodils.

We have quoted enough to show Wordsworth's characteristic treatment of plants. Seldom do his observations disclose scientific knowledge, although occasionally he comes near it, as when he says :—

> Not seldom did we stop to watch some tuft
> Of dandelion seed or thistle's beard
> That skimmed the surface of the dead calm lake,

or refers to the royal fern in this wise—

> Chiefly that tall fern
> So stately of the Queen Osmunda named.

His references to the stone-crop and convolvulus are striking and correct :—

> That bright weed,
> The yellow stone-crop, suffered to take root
> Along the window's edge.

> The cumbrous bind-weed, with its wreaths and bells,
> Had twined about her two small rows of peas
> And dragged them to the earth.

One of his most Tennysonian strokes is in *The Cumberland Beggar*, where he compares a worn-out human being to

> The dry remnant of a garden flower
> Whose seeds are shed.

On the whole, we find him in this respect weaker than we expected when we began this inquiry. We must not, however, omit to call attention to his happy use of flowers for simple similes. Luke bore on his cheek "two steady roses that were five years old!" That is commonplace except for the way of putting it. Harry Gill's cheeks "were red as ruddy clover". This is new and felicitous. Of old Simon Lee it is said that "the centre of his cheek is red as a ripe cherry!"

rising out of scientific knowledge ; it is also imperative that the real explanation of this fact should be given. Wordsworth is as accurate and reliable as Tennyson, but he is less minute ; he is more bare, more plain, more bald, more simple, less rich, less objective, but more spiritual and penetrating in essentials. We now proceed to illustrate such particularities as do occur. Wordsworth spent much of his day in the open air, wandering by himself, consequently he saw animal life at its best, and under the most favourable circumstances. Hence we have such pictures as these :—

> The bat, lured forth where trees the lane o'ershade,
> Flits and reflits along the close arcade ;
> The busy dor-hawk chases the white moth
> With burring note.

The dor-hawk is the goat-sucker or night-jar, and every circumstance is correctly given. Take next the vivid picture of the hare on a dewy morning :—

> On the moors
> The hare is running races in her mirth ;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist that, glittering in the sun,
> Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

This bears internal evidence of being written on the spot. So it is with his allusions to the glow-worm (which is one of his favourite topics), to the

owl, the stock-dove, the thrush, the skylark, and other birds.

The Skylark of Wordsworth naturally suggests comparison with Shelley's better-known poem on the same subject. Shelley's is incomparably superior, both in expression, in musical rhythm, and in imagery, but his skylark is to a large extent a creature of fancy, false to nature, and hyperbolically idealised. Wordsworth's is, as we should expect, much more in consonance with the facts. He notes the rapture of its song ; its thought of the nest on the ground ; the rapid vibration of its wings ; its sudden and abrupt cessation from song, and its rapid descent into the nest. Wordsworth brings out all these points, while Shelley notes but one or two of them.

> Ethereal minstrel ! pilgrim of the sky !
> Dost thou despise the earth, where cares abound ?
> Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
> Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground ?—
> Thy nest, which thou canst drop into at will,
> Those quivering wings composed, that music still !
>
> Leave to the nightingale her shady bower ;
> A privacy of glorious light is thine ;
> Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
> Of harmony, with instinct more divine—
> Type of the wise, who soar but never roam ;
> True to the kindred points of heaven and home !

She, in a mother's care, her beauty's pride
Forgetting, calls the wearied to her side.
Alternately they mount her back and rest,
Close by her mantling wings' embraces prest.

Here are some graphic touches (the nibbling at the water-lilies, and the playing with the floating grasses) absolutely correct to fact in every particular, and proving that Wordsworth thus early used his own eyes, and kept them fixed on the object to be described. That was his own, although the rhythm of his verse is borrowed from Pope. In the same poem occur the lines :—

Where the duck dabbles 'mid the rustling sedge
And feeding pike starts from the water's edge,
Or the swan stirs the reeds, his neck and bill
Wetting, that drip upon the water still ;
And heron, as resounds the trodden shore,
Shoots upward, darting his long neck before.

Such was Wordsworth's early work. The paintings of a young artist are sometimes characterised by minutely careful and punctilious filling in of small details ; as he gains greater confidence in himself, his brush takes a bolder sweep, and he gives the broader aspects of his subject without descending to *minutiæ*. Some such evolution was noticeable in Wordsworth. His later work shows that he still had the power of painting details, but

only occasionally did he exercise it; he preferred the larger view, the more outstanding features. It is on record that he objected to Walter Scott's habit of going forth with notebook and pencil to jot down the names of plants found in a particular scene which he was describing. "He should have left his pencil and his notebook at home, fixed his eye as he walked with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated; that which remained—the picture surviving in his mind—would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so in a large part by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental; a true eye for Nature does not note them or at least does not dwell on them."

We have perhaps unduly lingered on this topic, but it is necessary to prepare such readers as are not Wordsworthians for the fact that Wordsworth is far behind Tennyson in his wealth of allusions

Here in safe covert, on the shallow snow,
And sometimes on a speck of visible earth,
The redbreast near me hopped.

The *Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly* suggests comparisons with Tennyson's allusion to the red tooth and ravenous claw of Nature; but Wordsworth takes a more complaisant view of the situation, and does allow a shade of pessimism to darken his language. His poem is a playful rebuke to the little bird, and nothing more. It suggests no thoughts of rapine and cruelty.

Art thou the bird whom man loves best—
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English robin?
The bird that comes about our doors
When autumn winds are sobbing?

If the butterfly knew but his friend,
Hither his flight he would bend,
And find his way to me
Under the branches of the tree:
In and out he darts about.

What ailed thee, Robin, that thou could'st pursue
A beautiful creature
That is gentle by nature?
Beneath the summer sky
From flower to flower let him fly;
'Tis all that he wishes to do.
The cheerer thou of our indoor sadness,
He is the friend of our summer gladness.

What hinders, then, that ye should be
Playmates in the sunny weather,
And fly about in the air together ?
His beautiful wings in crimson are drest—
A crimson as bright as thine own :
Would'st thou be happy in thy nest,
O pious bird ! whom man loves best,
Love him or leave him alone !

In another poem, written at a later period, the poet refers to the same bird, dwelling specially upon its autumn singing.

Thrice happy guest
If from a golden perch of aspen spray
(October's workmanship to rival May)
The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast,
That moral sweeten by a heaven-taught lay,
Lulling the year, with all its cares, to rest.

Wordsworth was not, like Tennyson, a dweller by the sea, except occasionally at holiday times, but he made good use of these seaside visits, and they contributed some striking illustrations to his poetry. The Highland girl struggling to express her thoughts in English speech, where her vocabulary is limited, drew from him this beautiful simile :—

So have I, not unmoved in mind,
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind,
Thus beating up against the wind.

Here we have the whole of one of his poems on the lark, and brief though it is, it crystallises all the bird's activities, adding besides the characteristic Wordsworthian moral—type of the wise who rotate round the two poles of heaven and home. And what a wealth of meaning is contained in the exquisite line, "A privacy of glorious light is thine". The same sentiments are re-expressed in *A Morning Exercise*, as also in his earlier poem, *Up with Me! Up with Me into the Clouds.*

No bird held so large a part in Wordsworth's affections, however, as the cuckoo. He is constantly recalling it throughout his poems, besides devoting one of his finest lyrics to its praise. After all, were it not that it babbles of sunshine and flowers, and is the embodiment of spring fully realised, the bird would not deserve the idolatry it inspires, for its ways are somewhat ignoble, in so far as it delegates its domestic duties to others, performing them only by proxy, and being in the hands of Nature a cruel instrument for the destruction of other and more deserving members of the feathered race. Such unamiable qualities are naturally ignored by the poets, and what they dwell upon are the associations with spring, the mystery

of its keeping itself concealed, and its peculiar and twofold note.

> While I am lying on the grass
> Thy two-fold shout I hear,
> From hill to hill it seems to pass,
> At once far off and near.
>
> The same whom in my schoolboy days
> I listened to ; that cry
> Which made me look a thousand ways
> In bush and tree and sky.
>
> To seek thee did I often rove
> Through woods and on the green ;
> And thou wast still a hope, a love,
> Still longed for, never seen.

All this is very fine, but the poem, it will be noted, is made up largely of associations with spring and the joyous time of youth ; the scientific side contains only half the truth, a matter of note and of shyness, without any reference to other points. We have, of course, no reason to quarrel with that, provided what is actually mentioned is consonant with fact.

The redbreast, that universal favourite of old and young, figures many times in Wordsworth's poetry.

> The redbreast sings from the tall larch
> That stands beside our door.

played by this tiny bird in the structure of a cosy home.

Among the dwellings framed by birds
In field or forest with nice care
Is none that with the little wren's
In snugness may compare.

No door the tenement requires
And seldom needs a laboured roof ;
Yet is it to the fiercest sun
Impervious and storm-proof.

Then he proceeds to dilate upon birds' nests in general, how their architects love a "shadowy quietness," "sequestered lanes," and so on, some choosing more wisely than others.

This, one of those small builders proved
In a green covert, where from out
The forehead of a pollard oak
The leafy antlers sprout ;

For she who planned the mossy lodge,
Mistrusting her evasive skill,
Had to a primrose looked for aid
Her wishes to fulfil.

He showed the nest "to some whose minds without disdain can turn to little things," and, looking for it some days later, found it gone, as he thought. He was wrong ; the primrose leaves had expanded and covered it up.

Just three days after, passing by
In clearer light, the moss-built cell
I saw—espied its shaded mouth
And felt that all was well.

The primrose for a veil had spread
The largest of her upright leaves ;
And thus for purposes benign
A simple flower deceives.

Thus did Wordsworth, like Burns, "build a princely throne on humble truth," could breathe grandeur upon the very humblest face of human life, and could draw wholesome lessons from the contemplation of common things—lessons more edifying to him than those of learned books.

Books ! 'tis a dull and endless strife.
Come hear the woodland linnet ;
How sweet his music ! On my life
There's more of music in it.

And hark ! how blithe the throstle sings !
He, too, is no mean preacher.
Come forth into the light of things :
Let Nature be your teacher.

Another bird poem was inspired by a wren that haunted for many years the summer-house between the two terraces at Rydal Mount. This unassuming shy little bird is used to point the contrast with a flaunting, dazzling, highly-coloured Australian parrot, ambitious to be seen and heard, as well

Another is when he describes two inseparable children as being unhappy if they are

> more divided than a sportive pair
> Of seafowl, conscious both that they are hovering
> Within the eddy of a common blast,
> Or hidden only by the concave depth
> Of neighbouring billows from each other's sight.

The idea is excellent, although not worded so felicitously as usual.

Another feature of Wordsworth's use of birds is the frequency of his reference to their nests.

> Here, thronged with primroses, the steep rock's breast
> Glittered at evening like a starry sky ;
> And in this bush our sparrow built her nest,
> Of which I sang one song that will not die.

The song here mentioned is *The* (hedge) *Sparrow's Nest* of 1801, beginning thus :—

> Behold, within the leafy shade,
> Those bright blue eggs together laid !
> On me the chance-discovered sight
> Gleamed like a vision of delight.

The sight recalls an earlier experience, when, as a boy, he found a similar nest, which he and his sister constantly visited together. This in turn gives him the opportunity for that inimitable description of the fascination which the nest had for Dorothy.

She looked at it and seemed to fear it ;
Dreading, though wishing to be near it,
Such heart was in her, being then
A little prattler among men.

Compare with this that equally delicate tribute to Dorothy's sweet angelic disposition in *To a Butterfly*.

A very hunter did I rush
Upon the prey ; with leaps and springs
I followed on from brake to bush ;
But she, God love her, feared to brush
The dust from off its wings.

The pathos of an old nest which has served its purpose, and is now deserted, does not pass unnoticed.

A single beech tree grew
Within this grove of firs ! and on the fork
Of that one beech appeared a thrush's nest—
A last year's nest, conspicuously built
At such small elevation from the ground
As gave sure sign that they, who in that house
Of nature and of love had made their home
Amid the fir trees, all the summer long
Dwelt in a tranquil spot.

His most elaborate effort in this kind is his *Wren's Nest*, written in 1833. It extends to eighteen stanzas, so that we cannot make adequate quotation, but one or two verses may be given. It dwells particularly on the skill and artistic instinct dis-

as pleased to be admired, and the poet naïvely asks of his daughter Dora whether she had rather be the parrot, caressed, applauded, fed upon dainties, or Nature's darkling of the mossy shed. There is no doubt which of the two Wordsworth wished his daughter to be.

> This moss-lined shed, green, soft and dry,
> Harbours a self-contented wren,
> Not shunning man's abode, though shy
> Almost as thought of human ken.
>
> Strange places, coverts unendeared,
> She never tried ; the very nest
> In which this child of spring was reared
> Is warmed through winter by her feathery breast.
>
> To the bleak winds she sometimes gives
> A slender, unexpected strain ;
> Proof that the hermitess still lives,
> Though she appear not and be sought in vain.

The wood-pigeon, as one might suppose, is a favourite with Wordsworth, as it is with most poets ; the bird's homely note, its retired mode of life, its loving nature are all poetic in their appeal. We must explain, however, that Wordsworth makes a mistake in the naming of the bird ; he calls it the stock-dove several times over. Now, the habits of the stock-dove are quite distinct from those of the ring-dove or wood-pigeon or cushat. The

beautiful stanza, written in 1807, is a well-known passage.

> I heard a stock-dove sing or say
> His homely tale this very day ;
> His voice was buried among trees
> Yet to be come at by the breeze ;
> He did not cease ; but cooed and cooed ;
> And somewhat pensively he wooed :
> He sang of love, with quiet blending,
> Slow to begin and never ending ;
> Of serious faith and inward glee
> That was the song—the song for me.

Now, the stock-dove does not nest in trees, but more usually in rabbit-burrows. The poet makes the same mistake again when he says :—

> True as the stock-dove to her shallow nest
> And to the grove that holds it.

Another beautiful line on the same theme is—

> Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods.

It is quite clear that in these three references he has the wood-pigeon in his mind, and that he makes no distinction between the two varieties of pigeon.

The owl—that harmless and highly useful bird —has fared badly with the poets. They regard him as an uncanny creature, and their favourite epithets for him are moping, boding, dismal. This

wrong impression is easily explicable by the fact that the bird's favourite period of activity is in the dusk. Moreover, his goggle eyes, his soft, almost inaudible flight, and his melancholy hoot all contribute to the weird picture usually drawn, though undeservedly, of this cat in feathers. The solitudes of the Lake District are favourable regions for hearing the owl, and the bird figures frequently in Wordsworth's poetry.

> The tremulous sob of the complaining owl

occurs in *The Evening Walk*—an early poem. The same phrase is repeated in *The Idiot Boy*.

> The owlets through the long, blue night
> Are shouting to each other still ;
> Fond lovers, yet not quite hob-nob,
> They lengthen out the tremulous sob
> That echoes far from hill to hill.

The best passage, however, is that in *The Excursion* beginning, "There was a boy," and describing how this boy imitated the hooting of the owls, and during a pause of silence felt the mysterious power of Nature enter his soul—a very characteristically Wordsworthian sentiment.

> Many a time,
> At evening, when the earliest stars began
> To move along the edges of the hills,

Rising or setting, would he stand alone
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake ;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him.—And they would shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals
And long halloos, and screams and echoes loud,
Redoubled and redoubled : concourse wild
Of jocund din ! And when there came a pause
Of silence such as baffled his best skill :
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents ; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

Another fine description of the owl occurs in a late poem (1834), "The leaves that rustled on this oak-crowned hill". The mountains enclosing Grasmere are very favourable to the reverberation of sound, and this is the point which the poet elaborates.

Sound is there none at which the faintest heart
Might leap, the weakest nerve of superstition start ;
Save when the owlet's unexpected scream
Pierces the ethereal vault ; and the imaginative bird

Seems 'mid inverted mountains, not unheard.
Grave creature !—whether, while the moon shines bright
On thy wings opened wide for smoothest flight,
Thou art uncovered in a roofless tower,
Rising from what may once have been a lady's bower ;
Or spied where thou sitt'st moping in thy mew
At the dim centre of a churchyard yew ;
Or, from a rifted crag or ivy-tod
Deep in a forest, thy secure abode,
Thou giv'st, for pastime's sake, by shriek or shout,
A puzzling notice of thy whereabout.—
May the night never come, nor day be seen,
When I shall scorn thy voice or mock thy mien !

This is less poetical, but it gathers up very successfully the different amenities of owl life, and seems to be a versified account of the bird's natural history, such as might be found in a scientific book.

CHAPTER VII

MATTHEW ARNOLD AS NATURALIST

Though a genuine lover of Nature, and educated during the period of the scientific awakening of the nineteenth century, M. Arnold did not infuse much of the scientific spirit into his verse. Yet there is ample material in his poetry for a short exposition from this standpoint, and we render him such a tribute all the more heartily that as a poet he has not received the meed of popularity and appreciation that were his due. He is a great poet, a greater master of his art than many give him credit for, and his poetry well rewards most careful study, only it does not appeal to a large class of readers, being somewhat too classical in form and in allusion for the man in the street ; to the cultured reader, however, it is a source of perpetual and unfailing delight. Arnold had the misfortune to be eclipsed by both Tennyson and Browning, and the lack of support which he suffered,

and of which he was too conscious, served to dry up his poetic springs. It is safe to say that if he had come a generation later he would have touched a wider circle of readers, and reached a deeper appreciation.

In early life he was much in the country, and although as an inspector of schools he was a strenuous advocate of the Humanities, and insisted on the supreme importance of literature as an educational force, in opposition to the aridities of mere science teaching, yet he was by no means out of touch with scientific truth, and went to Nature for several of his most impressive and characteristic lessons. Even in Kensington Gardens, within hearing of the roar of London traffic, he could say :—

> Here at my feet what wonders pass—
> What endless active life is here !
> What blowing daisies, fragrant grass—
> An air-stirr'd forest, fresh and clear !
>
> In the huge world, which roars hard by,
> Be others happy if they can ;
> But in my helpless cradle I
> Was breathed on by the rural Pan.

This is sufficiently explicit, but even without such definite avowal, one could guess as much from the

poet's frequent references to Nature's activities. One thought is constantly recurring, namely, that man should copy Nature's steady, silent, serious work, so different from the feverous excitability and fussiness and turmoil of human ways.

> One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee—
> One lesson which in every wind is blown,
> Of toil unsever'd from tranquillity.

We should strive

> To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool,

for Nature is mild and inscrutably calm.

> Calm soul of all things ! make it mine
> To feel amid the city's jar
> That there abides a peace of thine
> Man did not make and cannot mar.

Apart from these declarations, we have only to read the following description of vanishing winter (in *Balder Dead*) to see what a close observer M. Arnold is of external phenomena, and how well he can choose the proper words to express them.

> And as in winter, when the frost breaks up—
> At winter's end, before the spring begins
> And a warm west wind blows, and thaw sets in—
> After an hour a dripping sound is heard
> In all the forests, and the soft strewn snow
> Under the trees is dibbled thick with holes,
> And from the boughs the snow loads shuffle down,

> And, in fields sloping to the south, dark plots
> Of grass peep out amid surrounding snow
> And widen.

The two verbs "dibbled" and "shuffle" are selected with singular felicity, and inevitably indicate the master who can send his arrow straight to the mark.

Or take another passage, of a somewhat different kind, from *Tristram and Iseult* :—

> This open glen was studded thick with thorns,
> Then white with blossom ; and you saw the horns,
> Through last year's fern, of the shy fallow deer
> Who come at noon down to the water here.
> You saw the bright-eyed squirrels dart along
> Under the thorns on the green sward ; and strong
> The blackbird whistled from the dingles near,
> And the weird chipping of the wood-pecker
> Rang lonelily and sharp ; the sky was fair,
> And a fresh breath of spring stirr'd everywhere.

This equally indicates a man to whom the flowers of the field and the bird and the animal life are a source of inspiration, a man who sees things for himself, and feels his pulse quicken in contemplating the interesting creatures that frequent the woods. Sometimes he uses an illustration of a recondite type, drawn from his reading in scientific books ; witness that fine allusion in one of his sonnets to Coral Islands. He is describing man's nature :—

That rays her powers, like sister islands seen
Linking their coral arms under the sea,
Or cluster'd peaks with plunging gulfs between
Spann'd by aërial arches all of gold.

The next quotation will show that, like Tennyson, he has an eye that notes buds, before the leaf comes, and is cognisant of the changes in the colouring of twigs as spring approaches.

This winter eve is warm,
Humid the air! Leafless, yet soft as spring,
The tender purple spray on copse and briers.

He is a lover of trees, and takes pains to particularise the differences in their habit and appearance. Prominent in this connection are his allusions to the pine and the mountain ash. Take this Swiss picture :—

The morning sun
On the wet umbrage of their glossy tops,
On the red pinings of their forest floor,
Drew a warm scent abroad ; behind the pines
The mountain-skirts, with all their silvan change
Of bright-leaf'd chestnuts and moss'd walnut trees
And the frail scarlet-berried ash, began.

Again,

Those black-crown'd, red-boled pine trees stand.

And in *The Strayed Reveller* :—

The Centaurs, in the streams,
Where red-berried ashes fringe

The clear brown shallow pools,
With streaming flanks, and heads
Rear'd proudly snuffing
The mountain wind.

Once more, a picture of hollies :—

In the smooth centre of the opening stood
Three hollies side by side, and made a screen,
Warm with the winter sun, of burnish'd green,
With scarlet berries gemm'd, the fell-fare's food.

Then the lime tree :—

And air-swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with shade.

Such allusions are quite within the range of the ordinary educated man ; there are few cultured people who do not know that hollies have glossy leaves, that they have red berries, which the field-fares make their winter food ; few also but know that the lime tree flowers in July and scatters its feathery spray of blossoms in August. Still, there is a firm certitude and a sureness of touch in these descriptions that makes them pleasing to the reader. Note that Arnold is highly susceptible to perfumes. Tennyson dwells particularly on the murmurous hum of bees amongst the tender flowers ; Arnold is more alive to the scent. The relative sense-

endowment of various poets is an interesting inquiry, and the occasion is opportune for a short digression on the subject. Thomas Gray, as a poet, was strongly susceptible to sweet odours. He took care that his windows at Cambridge should be always full of mignonette or some other sweetly scented plant, and when in London and studying at the British Museum he trudged daily over to Covent Garden for his sweetpeas and pinks, double stocks and flowering marjoram. It was different with Walter Scott, whose sense of smell was absolutely *nil;* his dominant sense was sight, which would seem to have extinguished or absorbed the activity which, in other men, belongs to the olfactory nerves. Keats, on the other hand, was strongest in taste; he had "a sweet tooth," which is constantly in evidence in his poetry. Perfume was not thrown away upon him, but the gustatory was more powerful than the olfactory. M. Arnold, like Gray, enjoyed sweet perfumes.

> From the grey-walled gardens a breath
> Of the fragrant stock and the pink
> Perfumes the evening air.

Even in that beautiful picture of the hyacinth, accidentally cut down by a clumsy gardener, the

fragrance is not forgotten. Sohrab lay slain on the ground

> Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
> Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,
> Mowing the garden grass plots near its bed,
> And lies a fragrant tower of purple bloom
> On the mown dying grass.

Many other allusions to the fragrance of flowers might be quoted :—

> Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
> Soon shall we have gold-dusted snap-dragon,
> Sweet-william with his homely cottage-smell,
> And stocks in fragrant blow.

> Bluebells [*i.e.*, wild hyacinths] perfume all the air.

> And long-drawn shoots
> Of ivy plants, and fragrant hanging bells
> Of hyacinths, and on late anemonies
> That muffle its wet banks.

The smell of fresh-cut grass is a marked pleasure to many people, and M. Arnold is one of them.

> Sweet heaps of fresh-cut grass.

> Scent of hay new-mown.

The same sensitiveness to odours is noticeable in that homely simile in *Balder Dead* :—

> As in some boor's yard a sweet-breath'd cow
> Whose manger is stuffed full of good fresh hay,
> Snuffs at it daintily, and stoops her head
> To chew the straw, her litter, at her feet.

Let us now run over his catalogue of flowers, dwelling more particularly on those that have appeared but rarely in poetry. Most characteristic, perhaps, is the gentian. Arnold had travelled much in Switzerland, where the blue and the yellow gentians are seen in perfection, and impress every traveller who has the good fortune to behold them.

> On this mild bank above the stream
> (You crush them !) the blue gentians gleam.
>
> The gentian flower'd pass, its crown
> With yellow spires aflame. (*Gentiana lutea.*)

Again, in *Empedocles on Etna* :—

> See how the giant spires of yellow bloom
> Of the sun-loving gentian, in the heat,
> Are shining on those naked slopes like flame.

The anemone is another of his favourites, and has a place in most of his flower passages :—

> The frail-leaf'd, white anemony,
> Dark bluebells drench'd with dews of summer eves,
> And purple orchises with spotted leaves.

The epithet "frail-leaf'd" is one more proof how determined the poet is to find his own adjectives and to apply them with fitness.

> Woods with anemonies in flower till May.

Again,

> White anemonies
> Starr'd the cool turf and clumps of primroses
> Ran out from the dark underwood behind.

The orchis is another interesting wild flower that Arnold lays store by. We found it above in the company of the anemone and the bluebell, mention being made of its spotted leaves.

> High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises.

> The orchis red gleams everywhere ;
> Gold furze with brooms in blossom vies.

Poems like *The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*, where the local colour is entirely from Oxford, are a perfect repertory of Oxfordshire botany. It is clear that Arnold was a botanist, and took pleasure in searching for and identifying the local *flora*.

> Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,
> And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
> Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep.

> Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave
> Under a dark, red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

The red fruit of the yew is worth noting.

> When garden walks and all the grassy floor
> With blossoms red and white of fallen May
> And chestnut-flowers are strewn.

The sweet spring days,
With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,
And bluebells trembling by the forest ways.

I know the wood where hides the daffodil,
I know what white, what purple fritillaries
The grassy harvest of the river-fields
Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields.

Red loose-strife and blond meadow-sweet among.

Note the "blond" as a new and exact descriptive epithet for the queen of the meadow.

These extracts lose much by being set down in isolation. Their full charm comes only to those who read the two poems through, and who have some knowledge of the environs of "that sweet city with her dreaming spires".

Other flowers not usually found in verse are the monkshood, the saffron, the hollyhock, and the sea-stock.

There its dusky blue clusters
The aconite spreads. (Monkshood.)

All around
The boundless, waving grass plains stretch, thick-starred
With saffron and the yellow hollyhock
And flag-leaved iris flowers.

We went up the beach by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom.

This is *Matthiola sinuata*, the sea-stock gilliflower.

Arnold is not perhaps a profound botanist, but he knows all the plants of his own locality, and knows where to find them. Moreover, he takes pleasure in describing them for himself, with fresh epithets of his own, unborrowed from scientific manuals.

CHAPTER VIII

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S BIRDS

The exploring of rural districts, waste places, woods, hill-sides and river banks for rare flowers, and the identifying of the specimens there found, do not play a large part in modern botany ; but such a pastime gives a pleasure all its own. It is clear from the passages already quoted that Arnold tasted the joy of wandering, *Flora* in hand, and making the acquaintance of new faces, as well as recognising old friends like the fritillaries and the gentians in their fresh spring garb. With the flowers go the birds, and Arnold was of necessity also a bird lover. His aviary is not extensive, and does not include many birds that find place in poetic effusions. The lark and the linnet are not in it, and his reference to song-birds generally and the sweetness of their music is of the most meagre. He is more concerned with their habits, migration, food, flight, and with tragic incidents in their life.

The swallow is much in evidence in his poetry, as well as the stork and the sea-fowl, and game-birds like the grouse and the partridge. His descriptions, as with those of flowers, are not conventional or trite, but are drawn directly from the object, pictures painted from his own observation. He once or twice mentions the thrush, the cuckoo, and the blackbird, and he has devoted one short poem to Philomela—the nightingale ; " the speckled missel-thrush " ; " In the pines the thrush is waking " ; " The blackbird picking food ".

> The cuckoo, loud on some high lawn,
> Is answer'd from the depth of dawn.

> When May,
> Brought by the west wind, returns
> Back to your native heaths,
> And the plover is heard on the moors.

> Between the waves and black o'erhanging cliffs,
> Where in and out the screaming seafowl fly.

> The shining seafowl, that with screams
> Bore up from where the bright Atlantic gleams,
> Swooping to landward.

> On the cliff-side the pigeons
> Roost deep on the rocks.

The phenomena of migration have great interest for him, whether drawn from his own observation or gathered from books of travel. Take this

beautiful and feeling picture of the swallows just prior to their autumnal flight :—

> And as the swallows crowd the bulrush beds
> Of some clear river, issuing from a lake,
> On autumn days, before they cross the sea,
> And to each bulrush crest a swallow hangs
> Quivering, and others skim the river-streams,
> And their quick twittering fills the banks and shores—
> So around Hermod swarmed the twittering ghosts.

He knows a swallow from a swift, as we see from his epithet " black-winged " in the line

> Where black-winged swallows haunt the glittering Thames.

Compare with his swallow-picture this other, of birds killed in crossing high mountain regions :—

> But as a troop of pedlars from Cabool
> Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,
> That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk-snow ;
> Crossing so high that, as they mount, they pass
> Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,
> Choked by the air, and scarce can they themselves
> Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries.

Or this, of migrating cranes crossing from the Steppes to Persia :—

> As when some grey November morn the files,
> In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes
> Stream over Casbin and the southern slopes
> Of Elburz, from the Arabian estuaries,
> Or some frore Caspian reed bed, southward bound
> For the warm Persian seaboard.

We have already quoted his reference to the fieldfare (or, as he calls it, the fell-fare) and its feeding on the red holly berries. His description of the grouse is accurate :—

> The red grouse springing at our sound,
> Skims now and then the shining ground.

So of the hawk swooping on a partridge :—

> As on some partridge in the corn a hawk
> That long has tower'd in the airy clouds
> Drops like a plummet.

Take, too, that beautiful and pathetic simile of the eagle, portrayed with such minuteness and sympathetic tenderness in *Sohrab and Rustum* :—

> As when some hunter in the spring hath found
> A breeding eagle sitting on her nest
> Upon the craggy isle of a hill-lake,
> And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,
> And follow'd her to find her where she fell
> Far off ; anon her mate comes winging back
> From hunting, and a great way off descries
> His huddling young left sole ; at that he checks
> His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
> Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
> Chiding his mate back to her nest ; but she
> Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
> In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
> A heap of fluttering feathers ;—never more
> Shall the lake glass her, flying over it ;
> Never the black and dripping precipices
> Echo her stormy scream as she sails by.

The same sympathetic note is struck in that other tragic simile which concludes *Balder Dead*:—

> And as a stork which idle boys have trapped,
> And tied him in a yard, at autumn sees
> Flocks of his kind pass flying o'er his head
> To warmer lands and coasts that keep the sun,
> He strains to join their flight, and from his shed
> Follows them with a long complaining cry—
> So Hermod gazed and yearn'd to join his kin.

It is a common belief that M. Arnold was too cold and austere as a poet, and that he kept too firm a hold on his feelings; there are occasions on which this may be true, but these two feelingly-worded pictures show what depth of sympathy he had for bird life, and all who are familiar with *Poor Matthias*—his tribute to a canary which his little daughter bought from a French bird-dealer in the town of Hastings, and which sang for the Arnold household for eight years — will recognise the warmth of feeling which lurked in that sensitive soul. In this poem he deplores the gulf that yawns between bird and man, and descants on our inability to enter into the feelings of a mere bird.

> Poor Matthias! couldst thou speak,
> What a tale of thy last week!
> Every morning did we pay
> Stupid salutations gay,

Suited well to health, but how
Mocking, how incongruous now!
Cake we offer'd, sugar, seed,
Never doubtful of thy need;
Praised perhaps thy courteous eye,
Praised thy golden livery.
Gravely thou the while, poor dear!
Sat'st upon thy perch to hear,
Fixing with a mute regard
Us, thy human keepers hard,
Troubling with our chatter vain
Ebb of life and mortal pain.

It is in this poem that the poet dwells upon the wonderful instincts in birds, and how much we have to learn from them.

Proof they give
Of a prescience more than ours—
Teach us, while they come and go,
When to sail and when to sow.
Cuckoo calling from the hill,
Swallow skimming by the mill,
Swallows trooping in the sedge,
Starlings swishing from the hedge,
Mark the seasons, map our year,
As they show and disappear.
But with all this travail sage,
Brought from that anterior age,
Goes an unreversed decree
Whereby strange are they and we,
Making want of theirs and plan
Indiscernible by man.

Equally touching is his sweet poem on Geist, the Dachshund, the pet of the family for four years.

> Yes ; only four ! and not the course
> Of all the centuries yet to come
> Can ever quite repeat the past
> Or just thy little self restore.

How lovingly Arnold dwells on this little dog's affectionate, winning ways, his liquid eyes, his broad brown paws, the flaps of his large ears, his keen intelligence, and how sincerely he mourns the loss of a real friend as he lays his canine companion in the stone-marked grave !

> That liquid, melancholy eye,
> From whose pathetic, soul-fed springs
> Seem'd surging the Virgilian cry,
> The sense of tears in mortal things.
>
> We stroke thy broad brown paws again,
> We bid thee to thy vacant chair,
> We greet thee by the window pane,
> We hear thy scuffle on the stair.
>
> We see the flaps of thy large ears
> Quick raised to ask which way we go ;
> Crossing the frozen lake appears
> Thy small dark figure on the snow !
>
> We lay thee, close within our reach,
> Here, where the grass is smooth and warm,
> Between the holly and the beech,
> Where oft we watch'd thy couchant form

Asleep, yet lending half an ear
To travellers on the Portsmouth road ;—
There build we thee, O guardian dear,
Mark'd with a stone, thy last abode !

Arnold would seem to have been a second Walter Scott in his love of dogs. What can be finer than his picture of the lost collie, who has come on market-day to town with his master, but has parted company with him in the crowded streets, and wears himself out running hither and thither looking for his owner? It is a touching passage, and graphically true to life.

Like as a farmer who hath lost his dog
Some morn at market in a crowded town—
Through many streets the poor beast runs in vain,
And follows this man after that for hours ;
And late at evening, spent and panting, falls
Before a stranger's threshold, not his home,
With flanks a-tremble, and his slender tongue
Hangs quivering out between his dust-smeared jaws,
And piteously he eyes the passers-by ;
But home his master comes to his own farm,
Far in the country, wondering where he is.

Besides *Geist's Grave* Arnold has another poem devoted to praise of a dog—*Kaiser Dead.* This is in a more facetious vein, "a plain stave," as suiting the subject, for Kaiser was a deception, notwithstanding his imperial cognomen. Bought as a

Dachshund, which his mother certainly was, this dog, as he grew up from puppyhood, began to disclose a collie ancestry, evidenced by his restless eye and his curling tail, but he was a faithful and affectionate friend for all his mongrel blood, and the poet's delineation of him is very effective, although it does not move to tears as the recital of Geist's virtues does.

> Soon, soon the days conviction bring:
> The collie hair, the collie swing,
> The tail's indomitable ring,
> The eye's unrest—
> The case was clear; a mongrel thing
> Kai stood confest.
>
> Thine eye was bright, thy coat it shone;
> Thou hadst thine errands off and on;
> In joy thy last morn flew; anon
> A fit! all's over;
> And thou art gone where Geist hath gone,
> And Toss and Rover.

Such is Nature in Matthew Arnold. He loved her well, and the contemplation of her ways brightened his life, and partly reconciled him to face the pessimism which he found in man's earthly lot. He hesitated as to the certainty of a future life; he therefore strove to take as much real joy from the present as he could. What he put into

the mouth of Empedocles, just before the final plunge into Etna's crater, might have been his own personal utterance.

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun,
To have lived light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done ;
To have advanced true friends, and beat down baffling foes—

That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And while we dream on this,
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose ?

CHAPTER IX

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL AS NATURALIST

APART from his *Biglow Papers*, the caustic wit and keen satire of which are well known to English readers, this American author's poetry has not received the recognition it deserves. Although a poet of genuine quality, and one who gave utterance to many felicitous and original lines, he suffers from a general verbosity and diffuseness and lack of proportion. Perhaps he wrote too much ; at all events it is certain that when he hit upon a good subject he often marred his treatment of it by over-elaborate introduction. He dallied too long in the entry. He had not learned that in poetry the half is greater than the whole. He once wrote : " One word with blood in't 's twice ez good ez two," but he sometimes forgets his own dictum. Endowed with phenomenal fluency and great skill in rhyming, he could spin verses by the yard. He is therefore apt to go on spinning long

after he has exhausted the patience of the reader. His fatal facility costs him many admirers. *An Indian Summer Reverie* is a fine subject and contains fine thoughts and striking expressions, but he does not know when to stop. It is overdone. This is the sort of defect that comes to a man who has no sense of humour, but that cannot be said of Lowell, and the cause of the weakness must be found elsewhere. Yet he wrote much that is delightful and charming, full of healthy, breezy optimism, wholesome and ennobling. He needs a Matthew Arnold of to-day to edit him and make a good selection of his verse. It is the only way to preserve his poetry as such from oblivion. We must always except *The Biglow Papers*, which stand by themselves unrivalled as a piquant and telling exposure of "humbug" in politics.

We are here concerned only with Lowell as a Nature poet, and we have chosen him to conclude the present series because he is particularly rich in the kind of lore for which we have been searching the poetry of the nineteenth century; moreover, the fact that he is an American will give a certain variety to the subject, since plant and bird life on the other side of the Atlantic are in some respects different from what we are accustomed to in our

country. Lowell was a passionate lover of Nature, and his poetry is steeped in Nature references—to trees and flowers and birds, and all the varying circumstances connected with Nature's change of raiment throughout the year. Speaking of Agassiz, the scientist, he described him as one who

> had the poet's open eye,
> That takes a frank delight in all it sees;

and the remark is singularly true of Lowell himself. He loved the outside world as much as Tennyson and Wordsworth, and although on the whole he does not paint so felicitously as Tennyson, has not the same happy skill in his wording, yet his turn of phrase is on occasion almost Tennysonian. And although he had not the same spirituality of insight that Wordsworth had, yet he sometimes approaches the Wordsworthian standpoint. In some respects he is like both, and touches each of them at various points. His picture of the dragon-fly in *The Fountain of Youth* shows close observation.

> Blue dragon-flies knitting
> To and fro in the sun,
> With side-long jerk flitting,
> Sink down on the rushes,
> And, motionless sitting,

Hear it bubble and run—
Hear its low inward singing,
With level wings swinging
On green-tasselled rushes
To dream in the sun.

This is, of course, far behind Tennyson's graphic picture, and yet the metaphor "knitting" is decidedly happy and new. *The Nightingale in the Study* is very close to Wordsworth. The poet calls his bookish friend to come out and enjoy the beauties of Nature.

Come out beneath the unmastered sky,
With its emancipating spaces,
And learn to sing as well as I
Without premeditated graces.

What boot your many-volumed gains
Those withered leaves for ever turning,
To win, at best, for all your pains,
A nature mummy-wrapt in learning?

The leaves wherein true wisdom lies
On living trees the sun are drinking;
Those white clouds, drowsing through the skies,
Grew not so beautiful by thinking.

The whole strain of thought here is undoubtedly suggested by Wordsworth's "Up! up! my friend," while Wordsworth's belief that "every flower enjoys the air it breathes" is paralleled by Lowell's—

> And I believe the brown earth takes delight
> In the new snowdrop, looking back at her,
> To think that by some vernal alchemy
> It could transmute her darkness into pearl.

Lowell's devotion to Nature, and his whole-hearted affection towards everything appertaining thereto, is expressed over and over again in his poetry. For instance, he can go so far as to say that the wisest man could ask no more of fate than

> To feel mysterious Nature ever new—
> To touch, if not to grasp, her endless clue,
> And learn by each discovery how to wait.

He has, it is clear, studied science to some purpose, but this fuller knowledge has not blotted out his poetic love. Keats thought that scientific knowledge strangles poetic thoughts ; but here Lowell declines to follow him.

> I grieve not that ripe knowledge takes away
> The charm that Nature to my childhood wore,
> For with that insight cometh day by day
> A greater bliss than wonder was before.
> The real doth not clip the poet's wings—
> To win the secret of a weed's plain heart
> Reveals some clue to spiritual things,
> And stumbling guess becomes firm-footed art.

In a fine poem, *Under the Willows*, he lays stress on his great love of trees, and hazards the facetious

conjecture that a tree was one of his far-off ancestors, such sympathy does he feel towards all the vegetable race.

> I care not how men trace their ancestry
> To ape or Adam ; let them please their whim ;
> But I in June am midway to believe
> A tree among my fair progenitors,
> Such sympathy is mine with all the race—
> Such mutual recognition vaguely sweet
> There is between us. Surely there are times
> When they consent to own me of their kin
> And condescend to me and call me cousin.

He is not like Peter Bell, who saw nothing special in a primrose. Lowell can say :—

> A buttercup
> Could hold for me a day's delight ;
> A bird could lift my fancy up
> To ether, free from cloud or blight.

In his poem, *To George W. Curtis*, he describes, like Wordsworth, his experiences as a boy, and the way in which his love of Nature was fostered.

> Dear were my walks, too, gathering fragrant store
> Of Mother Nature's simple-minded lore—
> I learned all weather signs of day or night,
> No bird but I could name him by his flight,
> No distant tree but by his shape was known,
> Or, near at hand, by leaf or bark alone.
> This learning, won by loving looks, I hived
> As sweeter lore than all from books derived.

I knew the charm of hillside, field, and wood,
Of lake and stream and the sky's downy brood,
Of roads sequestered, rimmed with sallow sod,
But friends with hardback, aster, golden rod,
Or succory, keeping summer-long its trust
Of heaven-blue fleckless from the eddying dust.
These were my earliest friends, and latest too,
Still unestranged, whatever fate may do.

After these strong pronouncements, we may expect Lowell's poetry to show at every turn his great love for natural history, and such is the case. A man cannot hide proclivities so intense. They come out whether he will or no. Let us illustrate now in some detail this feature of his work, beginning with the vegetable kingdom.

The rich milk-tingeing buttercup
Its tiny polished urn holds up,
Filled with ripe summer to the edge,
The sun in his own wine to pledge.

Here is a new idea in poetry—the fact that the yellow buttercup flowers give richness of colour to the milk, and especially to the butter of the cows feeding upon them. The idea is correct, although somewhat prosaic and agricultural.

Again—

The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace.

The reader will note Lowell's fondness for metaphors—the metaphor is his favourite figure, and he is constantly coining new ones. The lichens that cover the gravestones of two English soldiers killed at Concord, he very aptly calls the blazon of oblivion.

> Two graves are here: to mark the place
> At head and foot an unhewn stone,
> O'er which the herald-lichens trace
> The blazon of oblivion.

The birch is "the most shy and lady-like of trees," and in another poem he addresses the same tree thus :—

> Thou art to me like my beloved maiden,
> So frankly coy, so full of trembly confidences ;
> Thy shadow scarce seems shade, thy pattering leaflets
> Sprinkle their gathered sunshine o'er my senses,
> And Nature gives me all her summer confidences.

He is constantly moralising the activities of Nature. Two lovers, silent in the intensity of their feeling, can still convey their thoughts, as the bees carry fertilising pollen from flower to flower.

> But all things carry the heart's messages,
> And know it not, nor doth the heart well know,
> But Nature hath her will, even as the bees,
> Blithe go-betweens, fly singing to and fro
> With the fruit-quickening pollen.

Again, the scattering of seeds by the wind is like chance-sown thoughts that may take root in hearts lying open to receive them.

> There is no wind but soweth seeds
> Of a more true and open life,
> Which burst, unlooked for, into high-souled deeds,
> With wayside beauty rife.

There is considerable freshness in our poet's allusions to bees. In *Al fresco* we have—

> The dandelions and buttercups
> Gild all the lawn ; the drowsy bee
> Stumbles along the clover tops.

Here the word "stumbles" is a particularly happy description of the sometimes blundering clumsy flight of a bumble-bee, as he hurries from flower to flower, so in the same poem—

> The irreverent, buccaneering bee
> Hath stormed and rifled the nunnery
> Of the lily, and scattered the sacred floor
> With haste-dropt gold from shrine to door.

Here are new and striking metaphors, yet perfectly consonant with scientific fact. The destinies, moving on silently, work out their results slowly and surely like the coral under the sea.

> Patient are they as the insects that build islands in the deep,
> They heed not the bolted thunder, but their silent way they keep.

This is marred by the misuse of the term "insects" for such organisms as the corals. The same image is found in one of his sonnets, where, putting in a plea like M. Arnold for steady, tranquil work as against spasmodic bursts, he says :—

> Give me that growth which some perchance deem sleep,
> Wherewith the steadfast coral stems uprise,
> Which, by the toil of gathering energies,
> Their upward way into clear sunshine keep,
> Until, by heaven's sweetest influences,
> Slowly and slowly spreads a speck of green
> Into a pleasant island in the seas,
> Where, 'mid tall palms, the cane-roofed home is seen,
> And wearied men shall sit at sunset's hour,
> Hearing the leaves and loving God's dear power.

A masterly picture this, of the growth of a coral island, and a highly appropriate analogy as well.

We need not continue this kind of illustration ; the passages quoted are enough to show how thoroughly Nature has marked out this poet for her own. We conclude by citing one or two passages in which the atmosphere of country life, its sights and sounds, is strikingly brought home to the reader. The first is from the Prelude to *The Vision of Sir Launfal.*

> And what is so rare as a day in June ?
> Then, if ever, come perfect days ;

Then heaven tries earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays ;
Whether we look or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur or see it glisten ;
Every clod feels a stir of might—
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers ;
The flush of life may well be seen,
Thrilling back over hills and valleys ;
The cowslip startles in meadows green,
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace ;
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives ;
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings :
He sings to the wide world and she to her nest—
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best ?

We sit in the warm shade and feel right well
How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell ;
We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
That skies are clear and grass is growing ;
The breeze comes whispering in our ear
That dandelions are blossoming near,
That maize has sprouted, that streams are flowing,
That the river is bluer than the sky,
That the robin is plastering his house hard by ;
And if the breeze kept the good news back,

For other couriers we should not lack ;
We could guess it all by yon heifer's lowing ;
And hark ! how clear bold chanticleer,
Warmed with the new wine of the year,
Tells all in his lusty crowing !

There is the ecstasy, the rapture that fills the heart of man who is in tune with Nature. Here is the same sentiment, perhaps more happily expressed :—

Truly this life is precious to the root,
And good the feel of grass beneath the foot ;
To lie in buttercups and clover-bloom—
Tenants in common with the bees—
And watch the white clouds drift through gulfs of trees,
Is better than long wasting in the tomb ;
Only once more to feel the coming spring,
As the birds feel it when it bids them sing ;
Only once more to see the moon
Through leaf-fringed abbey-arches of the elms
Curve her mild sickle in the west,
Sweet with the breath of laylocks, were a boon
Worth any promise of soothsayer realms
Or casual hope of being elsewhere blest.

"Truly life is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun ;" such is the very simple creed of Lowell. He sees no virtue in death as long as the senses are unimpaired for the full enjoyment of all that this beautiful earth has to show to her children.

Our last quotation shall be from *The Biglow Papers* in the characteristic Yankee dialect, which adds a piquancy of its own.

Our spring gits everythin' in tune
An' gives one leap from April into June ;
Then all comes crowdin' in ; afore you think,
Young oak-leaves mist the side-hill woods with pink;
The cat-bird in the laylock bush is loud ;
The orchards turn to heaps o' rosy cloud ;
Red cedars blossom tu, though few folks know it,
An' look all dipt in sunshine like a poet ;
The lime trees pile their solid stacks o' shade
An' drows'ly simmer with the bees' sweet trade ;
In ellum-shrouds the flashin' hangbird clings,
An' for the summer v'y'ge his hammock slings ;
All down the loose-walled lanes in archin' bowers
The barb'ry droops its strings o' golden flowers,
Whose shrinkin' hearts the school gals love to try
With pins. They'll worry yourn so, boys, bimeby !

'Nuff sed. June's bridesman, poet o' the year,
Gladness on wings, the bobolink is here ;
Half hid in tip-top apple blooms he swings,
Or climbs against the breeze with quivering wings,
Or givin' way to't in a mock despair,
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air.

This superb description of the bobolink reminds us that we have avoided saying anything of Lowell's birds. These figure very prominently in his poetry, but we reserve them for our last chapter.

CHAPTER X

LOWELL'S BIRDS

Lowell, as we saw, was a soul in happy touch with Nature. The open air and the sight of trees and flowers acted upon his nervous system like an intoxicant. In the presence of Nature he felt stimulated, elevated, ecstatic. Nothing affected him so much in this way as the birds—the birds of America, which are unfamiliar to us—the bobolink, the oriole, the medrick, the loon, the phoebe, and so on. These are much in evidence in his verse ; he has full knowledge of their ways, and he paints them with great vividness and with, for him, unusual brevity. Take first his portrait of the owl as depicted in his little poem, *On Planting a Tree at Inverara*. The poet had been asked to plant a memorial tree at the Duke of Argyll's mansion-house. He signalised the occasion by some verses, in which one of his reflections is that a tree will live long after the planter is epitaphed

and forgotten ; it will expand its branches and become a shelter for man and beast.

> The wayfarer at noon reposing
> Shall bless its shadow on the grass,
> Or sheep beneath it huddle, dozing,
> Until the thunder-gust is past.
>
> The owl, belated in his plundering,
> Shall here await the friendly night,
> Blinking whene'er he wakes, and wondering
> What fool it was invented light.
>
> Hither the busy birds shall flutter,
> With the light timber for their nests,
> And, passing from their labour, utter
> The morning sunshine in their breasts.

That is the owl. The rook comes into his memorial verses on Agassiz.

> The garrulous memories
> Gather again from all their far-flown nooks,
> Singly at first, and then by twos and threes,
> Then in a throng innumerable, as the rooks
> Thicken their twilight files
> Tow'rd Tintern's grey repose of roofless aisles.

An Indian Summer Reverie is full of bird references. We quote two characteristic stanzas :—

> The cock's shrill trump that tells of scattered corn,
> Passed breezily on by all his flapping mates,
> Faint and more faint, from barn to barn is borne,
> Southwards, perhaps to far Magellan's Straits ;

Dimly I catch the throb of distant flails ;
Silently o'erhead the hen hawk sails,
With watchful, measuring eye, and for his quarry waits.

The sobered robin, hunger-silent now,
Seeks cedar-berries blue, his autumn cheer ;
The chipmunk, on the shingly shag bark's bough,
Now saws, now lists with downward eye and ear,
Then drops his nut, and cheeping, with a bound
Whisks to his winding fastness underground :
The clouds like swans drift down the streaming atmosphere.

We must not forget that the American robin is not our redbreast, but a different bird. The chipmunk is, of course, a squirrel. In his poem, *The Cathedral*, he describes how the sparrows have built their nests in its weather-beaten pinnacles.

About their shoulders sparrows had built nests,
And fluttered, chirping, from grey perch to perch,
Now on a mitre poising, now a crown,
Irreverently happy. While I thought
How confident they were, what careless hearts
Flew on these lightsome wings and shared the sun,
A larger shadow crossed ; and looking up,
I saw where, nesting in the hoary towers,
The sparrow-hawk slid forth on noiseless air
With sidelong head that watched the joy below—
Grim Norman baron o'er his clan of Kelts.

These are all good in their way, but the poet shines best when describing the birds of New England, the oriole and the bobolink, which are undoubtedly

his favourites and touch his heart most intimately. One of his poems called *The Nest* contrasts May and December. First comes the merry month :—

Then from the honeysuckle grey
The oriole with experienced quest
Twitches the fibrous bark away,
The cordage of his hammock-nest,
Cheering his labour with a note
Rich as the orange of his throat.

High o'er the loud and dusty road
The soft grey cup in safety swings,
To brim ere August with its load
Of downy breasts and throbbing wings,
O'er which the friendly elm-tree heaves
An emerald roof with sculptured eaves.

Thy duty, wingëd flame of spring,
Is but to love and fly and sing.
Oh ! happy life, to soar and sway
Above the life by mortals led,
Singing the merry months away,
Master, not slave, of daily bread,
And when the autumn comes, to flee
Wherever sunshine beckons thee.

This is the summer picture ; when December comes, there is a sad change ; the trees are leafless.

And thou, dear nest, whence joy and praise
The thankful oriole used to pour,
Swing'st empty, while the north winds chase
Their snowy swarms from Labrador :
But loyal to the happy past,
I love thee still for what thou wast.

As usual the poet moralises this very effectively. When in human beings the springs of life are dried up and when our branches, too, show the vacant nests of spring, yet with his optimistic outlook on life he trusts

> that, like the birds of spring,
> Our good goes not without repair,
> But only flies to soar and sing
> Far off in some diviner air,
> Where we shall find it in the calms
> Of that fair garden 'neath the palms.

The same image of the forsaken and outworn nest which we found so suggestive to other poets is used in *The Parting of the Ways*. As old age approaches, the senses are bereft of their keenness and become like superannuated nests.

> These senses, quivering with electric beats,
> Too soon will show, like nests on wintry boughs,
> Obtrusive emptiness, too palpable wreck,
> Which whistling north winds line with downy snow
> Sometimes, or fringe with foliaged rime, in vain,
> Thither the singing birds no more return.

Once more in *Auf Wiedersehen* the same thought is expressed.

> Two watched yon oriole's pendent dome,
> That now is void and dank with rain,
> And one—oh, hope more frail than foam!
> The bird to his deserted home
> Sings not—"Auf wiedersehen".

The poet measures time by this bird. Instead of saying 'tis fifty years since, he puts it more poetically thus :—

> The oriole's fledglings fifty times
> Have flown from our familiar elms.

The oriole comes into *Under the Willows*, where his nest-building is fully described.

> Hush ! 'tis he !
> My oriole, my glance of summer fire,
> Is come at last, and, ever on the watch,
> Twitches the pack-thread I had lightly wound
> About the bough to help his housekeeping—
> Twitches and scouts by turns, blessing his luck,
> Yet fearing me who laid it in his way,
> Nor, more than wiser we in our affairs,
> Divines the providence that hides and helps.
> *Heave ho ! heave ho !* he whistles as the twine
> Slackens its hold ; *once more now*, and a flash
> Lightens across the sunlight to the elm,
> Where his mate dangles at her cup of felt.

Now the oriole is an unknown bird to us, but apart from the fact that we have seen it in museums, have seen pictures of it in natural history books and have read of its pendent nest which rocks in the wind, and so forth, we have from these numerous descriptions of it a very good and no doubt absolutely correct idea of the bird—its orange

throat, its hanging dome-roofed nest, its cheery note.

So is it with the bobolink which is more in evidence even than the oriole.

> Meanwhile that devil-may-care the bobolink,
> Remembering duty, in mid-quaver stops,
> Just ere he sweeps o'er rapture's tremulous brink,
> And 'twixt the winrows most demurely drops,
> A decorous bird of business, who provides
> For his brown mate and fledglings six besides,
> And looks from right to left, a farmer 'mid his crops.

Describing the New England summer which " with one great gush of blossom storms the world," he gives a poetic rendering of the bobolink's song, something after the manner of Tennyson's *Throstle* :—

> But now, oh rapture ! sunshine winged and voiced,
> Pipe blown through by the warm wild breath of the West,
> Shepherding his soft droves of fleecy cloud,
> Gladness of woods, skies, waters, all in one—
> The bobolink has come, and like the soul
> Of the sweet season vocal in a bird,
> Gurgles in ecstasy we know not what
> Save *June ! Dear June ! Now God be praised for June.*

The bird comes into *The Biglow Papers* even, no picture of an American June being complete without this feathered songster.

June's bridesman, poet o' the year,
Gladness on wings, the bobolink is here ;
Half hid in tip-top apple bloom he swings,
Or climbs against the breeze with quiverin' wings,
Or givin' way to't in a mock despair,
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air.

Glancing at the conventions of poets who do not look at things for themselves, or if they do, are afraid to give expression to what they see, preferring to

talk o' daisies, larks, an' things
Ez though we'd nothin' here that blows an' sings,

he roundly affirms :—

Why, I'd give more for one live bobolink
Than a square mile o' larks in printer's ink.

Another bird—the phoebe—so called from its note, has a whole poem devoted to its praise. It sings this plain note at earliest dawn before the other birds are awake, and the poet throws much pathos and imagination into his reflections on the sad, plaintive cadence of this little waif in feathers.

It is a wee sad-coloured thing,
As shy and secret as a maid,
That, ere in choir the robins sing,
Pipes its own name like one afraid.

It seems pain-prompted to repeat
The story of some ancient ill,
But *Phoebe ! Phoebe !* sadly sweet
Is all it says, and then is still.

Phœbe ! is all it has to say
In plaintive cadence o'er and o'er,
Like children that have lost their way,
And know their names but nothing more.

I, in strange lands at grey of dawn,
Wakeful, have heard that fruitless plaint
Through memory's chambers deep withdrawn,
Renew its iterations faint.

So nigh ! yet from remotest years
It summons back its magic, rife
With longings unappeased, and tears
Drawn from the very source of life.

Al Fresco, from which we have already quoted passages on bees, must be drawn upon again for birds.

The robin sings, as of old, from the limb,
The cat-bird croons in the lilac bush !
Through the dim arbour, himself more dim,
Silently hops the hermit thrush,
The withered leaves keep dumb for him.

O unestrangëd birds and bees !
O face of Nature always true !
O never unsympathising trees !
O never rejecting roof of blue !

Methinks my heart from each of these
Plucks part of childhood back again,
Long there imprisoned, as the breeze
Doth every hidden odour seize

Of wood and water, hill and plain ;
Once more I am admitted peer
In the upper house of Nature here,
And feel through all my pulses run
The royal blood of wind and sun.

We cannot help noting two things about these passages : first, the poet's skill in phrase-making, as for example, when he calls the bobolink "sunshine winged," "gladness on wings," "June's bridesman," and the oriole "my glance of summer fire," "winged flame of spring". The same idea is here repeated again and again in varied language. The second point is the poet's determination to moralise and draw lessons from these phenomena. He does not paint the birds for their own sake, as a rule, but makes spiritual analogies of them. For example, in *Under the Willows* he is recalling the time when he lay under the willow tree and his soul went forth mingling with the tree and dancing in the leaves and indeed became a part of all that he beheld. Then he asks :—

Was I then truly all that I beheld ?
Or is this stream of being but a glass
Where the mind sees its visionary self,
As, when the kingfisher flits o'er his bay
Across the river's hollow heaven below,
His picture flits,—another, yet the same ?

Again, he uses the gaping nestlings, by a very deft analogy, for a spiritual purpose.

> And, as blind nestlings, unafraid,
> Stretch up wide-mouthed to every shade
> By which their downy dream is stirred,
> Taking it for the mother-bird ;
> So, when God's shadow, which is light,
> Unheralded, by day or night
> My wakening instinct falls across,
> Silent as sunbeams over moss,
> In my heart's nest unconscious things
> Stir with a helpless sense of wings,
> Lift themselves up, and tremble long
> With premonitions sweet of song.

Once more, descanting on the breadth of mind that sees good in everything, and is unwilling to acknowledge that only one way is right, he remarks that Nature is chary of sameness and that different modes of action are suitable for different conditions, and continues :—

> The beach-bird on its pearly verge
> Follows and flies the whispering surge,
> While in his tent, the rock-stayed shell
> Awaits the flood's star-timed vibrations,
> And both, the flutter and the patience,
> The sauntering poet loves them well.

The same image of the sandpiper or beach-bird is used in a humorous connection, but it quite

bears out what we have said on the skill of his analogies.

I've a notion, I think, of a good dinner speech,
Tripping light as a sandpiper over the beach,
Swerving this way and that as the wave of the moment
Washes out its slight trace with a dash of whim's foam on't
And leaving on memory's rim just a sense
Something graceful had gone by, a live present tense.

Equally good, though in a different vein, is—

As a twig trembles, which a bird
Lights on to sing, then leaves unbent,
So is my memory thrilled and stirred—
I only know she came and went.

The same analogy is repeated in his address to the Muse. She is difficult to catch ; he searches everywhere for her, but finds her too elusive.

I find the rock where thou dost rest,
The moss thy skimming foot hath prest ;
All Nature with thy parting thrills,
Like branches after birds new-flown.

Such is Lowell as a Nature poet. He was a genuine, hearty, lovable man, who drew his chief pleasure in life from watching the ways of Nature. He will be remembered longest as a kindly satirist, but his devotion to tree and flower and bird has added to the wealth of English poetry new images and fresh analogies that are well worthy of being garnered as we have tried to garner them.

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